A People's History of India

3A

The Age of Iron and the Religious Revolution

c. 700 – c. 350 BC

Krishna Mohan Shrimali

This monograph deals with a very important phase of Indian history, spanning *c.* 700 and *c.* 350 BC. During the period iron technology diffused, transforming and multiplying tools; cities arose and commerce spread; the caste system assumed practically all its essential features; powerful states were formed, with armies and bureaucracies; and, finally, Jainism and Buddhism brought about a veritable Religious Revolution. All this is described in four chapters with clarity and precision, but with no attempt to conceal points of controversy. Special notes are furnished on punch-marked coinage, the Northern Black Polished Ware, problems of chronology, and the arrival of writing. Nine extracts from source give the reader a taste of the textual sources. There are twelve illustrations and seven maps, and a chronological table at the end. Each chapter is provided with a bibliographical note, indicating sources and suggesting further reading.

ISBN: 81-89487-13-2

Rs 300

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A People's History of India 3A

THE AGE OF IRON AND THE RELIGIOUS REVOLUTION c. 700 – c. 350 BC

Krishna Mohan Shrimali

Aligarh Historians Society

Tulika Books

Published by
Tulika Books
35 A/1 (third floor), Shahpur Jat, New Delhi 110 049

© Text: Krishna Mohan Shrimali
Maps: Faiz Habib

First published in India 2007

ISBN: 81-89487-13-2

Designed by Ram Rahman; typeset at Tulika Print Communication Services, New Delhi; printed at Chaman Enterprises, 1603 Pataudi House, Daryaganj, Delhi 110 006

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General Editor's Preface

It is a privilege for this series to have a volume contributed to it by a historian of Professor Krishna Mohan Shrimali's eminence. This volume covers the period *c.* 700 to *c.* 350 BC, which saw the firm establishment of iron technology and of the caste system, and the rise of Jainism and Buddhism. The author has aptly emphasized in the title the twin processes of iron-use and religious change. Readers will obtain here a dispassionate account of the changes in economy, society and beliefs, and an informed appreciation of the main issues being now debated, from matters of chronology to archaeology and textual analysis. Much gratitude is owed to Professor Shrimali for having largely followed the pattern of the other volumes of this series in the arrangement of contents and the recommended explanatory style. The extracts from sources, technical notes, maps and illustrations should add further utility and interest to the volume.

The maps have been prepared by Faiz Habib, our regular cartographer, with advice from his senior colleague, Mr Zahoor Ali Khan. Mr Ghulam Mujtaba has carried out the photographic work required for the illustrations.

Mr Muneeruddin Khan has processed the entire manuscript for the press. Mr Arshad Ali took care, as usual, of our accounts; and Mr Idris Beg, of xeroxing and other necessary chores.

Professor Shireen Moosvi, Secretary of the Aligarh Historians Society, has been responsible for the overall organization of the preparatory work. Dr Rajendra Prasad and Ms Indira Chandrasekhar of Tulika Books, along with their colleague, Shad Naved, have continued to give their full support, along with a considerable amount of indulgence.

Before I close, there is an apology to be given for the clumsy number 3A that this volume bears. By a last-minute slip the volume on *Mauryan India*, published in 2004, was given the number 4 instead of 5 that was assigned to it in our scheme. Owing to this there was no option but to assign the number 3A to this volume.

IRFAN HABIB

Author's Preface

There has been a convention to designate the pre-Mauryan times as the 'Age of the Buddha'. This was, indeed, the title under which this volume was earlier announced under the People's History of India series. It has, however, been felt that such a title would not be suitable for this volume for two reasons. Firstly, the age of the Buddha would confine our treatment to practically the time he lived, say, the sixth or fifth century BC (there is dispute about his actual date, as we shall see in the main text), whereas we deal with a much longer period of time, spanning the period between *c.* 700 and *c.* 350 BC. Secondly, the times when the Buddha lived and preached were marked by not just his discourses, but also by significant religious–philosophic activities of other thinking men, although the Buddha and Mahāvīra happen to be undoubtedly those of whom we know the most. Further, the accent here is on understanding and explaining processes of historical change through a focus on locating the nature of qualitative changes in the lives of the people, though important individual personalities are not to be ignored.

Once we take the larger view of historical change, we can see that the three hundred and fifty years saw some developments of considerable importance. First of all, it was indubitably India's Age of Iron. Iron diffused and transformed tools, though this necessarily was a prolonged process. The resultant expansion of agricultural and craft production set the context, if not also the basis, of what is often called India's Second Urbanization, representing the reappearance of towns and cities after the end of the Indus Civilization over a thousand years earlier. The caste system began to assume the contours that were to cling to it inalienably from this time onwards. In the political sphere,

the ancient Indian state system arose out of a welter of tribal monarchies and 'republics'. Finally, there was the religious revolution, spearheaded by Mahāvīra and the Buddha, which brought into being religious systems that rejected the entire Vedic tradition and with it the Brahmanical ascendancy. The appellation 'heterodox' often applied to these movements appears somewhat to belittle their status as fundamentally independent and alternative systems, and so affects our ability to appreciate the full scope of the transformation in thought and belief that they helped to bring about. The title of this monograph aims at capturing the essence of all these varied changes, from technology to faith.

I am grateful to Professor Irfan Habib, the General Editor, for giving me the opportunity to contribute to this prestigious series, and for his varied comments, queries and suggestions, which, I believe, have greatly helped to enrich the text. I also join him in thanking all his colleagues in the Aligarh Historians Society and Tulika Books who have worked tirelessly to produce this volume with a keen eye on its aesthetics.

A word of special thanks for the Series Cartographer, Mr Faiz Habib. Much labour on his part has gone into locating various archaeological sites in the subcontinent and Afghanistan from topographic sheets, and putting them accurately on the maps drawn by him. He has been faced also with the problem of dealing with places and sites that cannot be confidently placed within the period of this monograph, but are referred to in the text. This, for example, is the case with *Map 1.2*, where post-300 BC hoards of punch-marked coins could not be shown, because the chronological limits had to be the same as those of the sites of Achaemenian and early Athenian coins also shown on that map. A partial solution has been found in showing most of the places mentioned in the text, irrespective of precise period limits, in the four larger regional maps (*Maps 3.1* to *3.4*). It is hoped that the reader will find this arrangement satisfactory.

KRISHNA MOHAN SHRIMALI

NOTE:

The scheme of transliteration adopted here departs from the conventional one in the following particulars: the 'c' of that system is represent-

ed here as 'ch' (as in the English word 'chat') and 'ch' is replaced by 'chh'; 'ri' substitutes for the conventional 'ṛ'; 'sh' for 'ś'; 'sh' for 'ṣ', and 'ksh' for 'kṣ'. The diacritics in quotations have been retained in their original form. We have generally refrained from Sanskritizing words occurring in Pali and Prakrit texts; for example, we read *gotta* instead of *gotra* where our source so gives it.

1
The Iron Age, Surplus and Economic Change, *c.* 700–*c.* 350 BC

If we were to give our attention primarily to the material conditions of the period with which we deal (*c.* 700–*c.* 350 BC), the crucial change that strikes us is represented by the diffusion of iron, with its significant impact on labour productivity. Iron did not simply substitute for copper, stone and bone in many tools; it brought into being new forms of tools and multiplied their number, so that the 'Iron Age' represents a new stage in the progress of agricultural and craft production.

In *The Vedic Age* (Chapter 3.3), in this series, the early discoveries of iron, forms of iron and the technology of its making, especially the complexities of 'steeling' of the iron surface, have already been discussed at some length. It has been stressed there that 'the technique was still so complex that, unlike the simple reduction of iron, it is difficult to conceive of the discovery being made independently of each other in different cultures. Diffusion from one source has, therefore, great probability on its side.' The change from copper to iron as the main material for tools had begun to take place in the upper Ganga basin around or before 700 BC. In south India, where iron-use seems to have begun earlier than in most parts of India (except perhaps the north-western borderlands), it is noted that 'copper-smelting itself had been a weak industry in the south Indian neolithic, so that an indigenous development of the complex process of iron-smelting and carburization there seems even more improbable.' From whatever external sources it may have been received, iron technology seems to have diffused rapidly across northern India and the peninsula after 700 BC, and for its use during this period we have both literary and archaeological evidence.

1.1 Iron in Northern India

Literary Evidence

In the Buddhist 'Pali canon', large parts of which go back to the fifth and fourth centuries BC, there are two common terms for metals, viz., '*loha*' and '*ayo*'. Both have been taken to denote iron or copper or bronze, or just metal in general. Frequently we encounter *lohaguḷa* and *ayoguḷa* ('a glowing ball'), the swallowing or touching of which serves as an example of torture or display of mental strength. In almost all such references in the early Pali canon, the plasticity of the heated metal is underlined: for example, 'a (metal) ball, if heated all day long, is lighter and softer, more plastic and radiant. . . .'

Yet another category of allusions is to assortments of metal cauldrons, jars, pots and vases (*lohakumbhi, lohabhāṇaka, lohavāraka* and *lohatāka*, respectively), as mentioned in the *Vinaya Piṭaka*. This text also enumerates various tools, such as razor, hoe, spade, axe and hatchet, without indicating the material they are made of. Heated vessels used as torturing vessels are mentioned in the *Majjhima* and *Saṃyutta Nikāyas*. In most cases such instruments are described as 'glowing ones', meant for punishing sinners in hell or to test the senses and the will-power of Buddhist monks. There are references, too, to metal thorns (*ayomaya simbaliyo*), beaks (*ayomukha*), and to metal ball and ploughshare (*ayoguḷaṃ cha phale*). The resistivity of '*ayo*' is expressed by the following verse in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*: 'Ye Fools! Ye seek . . . to chew iron (*ayo*) with teeth.'

Jain texts are less easy to date to as early a period as the Pali canon. Of these the *Bhagavatī* presents a picture of the working process of blacksmithy. The iron furnace (*ayakoṭṭha* or *bhaṭṭhā*) was filled with iron ore and this was handled by a man with tongs (*saṇḍāsī*). It was then taken out and placed on the anvil (*adhikaraṇi*) to be hammered with a mallet (*muṭṭhie*). It was heated again and again with the help of a leather bellowing bag (*chammettha*), malleted, cut, dipped into water to get cooled and given final shape. The blacksmith thus knew the art of tempering the iron piece and bringing the steel element to its surface layer.

At a relatively early date, the Greek world became interested in the Indian subcontinent. When Alexander (*d.* 323 BC) invaded north-western India (327–25 BC), Macedonian officers in his army brought back with them information of varying value relating to India. But long

TABLE 1.1 Arrival and Progress of the Iron Age

Written Sources			*Time Scale*	*Archaeological Evidence*		
Lexicography	*Technology*	*Economy*	*BC*	*North*	*Central*	*South*
Ayas= Metal (RV)			1100 1000 900	Pirak? Atranjikhera?		Halur?
Āma (SB) Shyāma Ayas (AV) = Iron		Sporadic Use (YV, AV)	800 700	Weapons	Ujjain?	Anuradhapura
Krishṇāyas Ayas = Iron (Up.)	Working Blooms (Up.)			Nails	Nails	
			600	Tools	Weapons	
			500			
				Sickles	Sickles	
Ayo	Plastic Forming (Pali)	Technical Use	400			
Loha (Pali)		(Pali) Extensive Use (J)	300 200	Utensils Iron Sheet Slags	Celts Tools	
Kala Loha (Mil.)	Prospecting & Mining (Kaut.)	Specialized Branches Embargo (Kaut.)		Hard Steel	Utensils	
Kala Yasa Tīkshṇa (Kaut.)	Smelting Hardening (Mil.)	Exporting High Quality Steel (Greek & Latin Sources)	100 1 BC	Hard Steel Bars Armour		Celts, Tools Bars Agricult. Implements
Vrita= Steel?			1 AD 100 200			

Explanations to Table 1.1

Abbreviations

AV	*Atharvaveda*
J	*Jātakas*
Kaut.	Kauṭilya, *Arthashāstra*
Mil.	*Milindapañha*
Pali	Pali Canon
RV	*Rigveda*
SB	*Shatapatha Brāhmaṇa*
Up.	Upanishads
YV	*Yajurveda*

Proto-Iron Age

Early Iron Age

Developed Iron Age

After R. Pleiner (modified)

before this, accounts of India reached Greece from sources such as Herodotus (*d.* 425 BC) and Ctesias (fifth century BC). The former describes weapons of the Indian contingent in the Persian army, but says that in comparison with Persian and Median warriors covered with iron, the Indians had only bows and arrows with iron points. Ctesias, on the other hand, refers to steel swords made of iron obtained from an Indian 'well', and exported to Persia. There is, however, some romanticization in Ctesias' narrative, which has only survived in stray quotations and references by later writers.

Archaeological Evidence

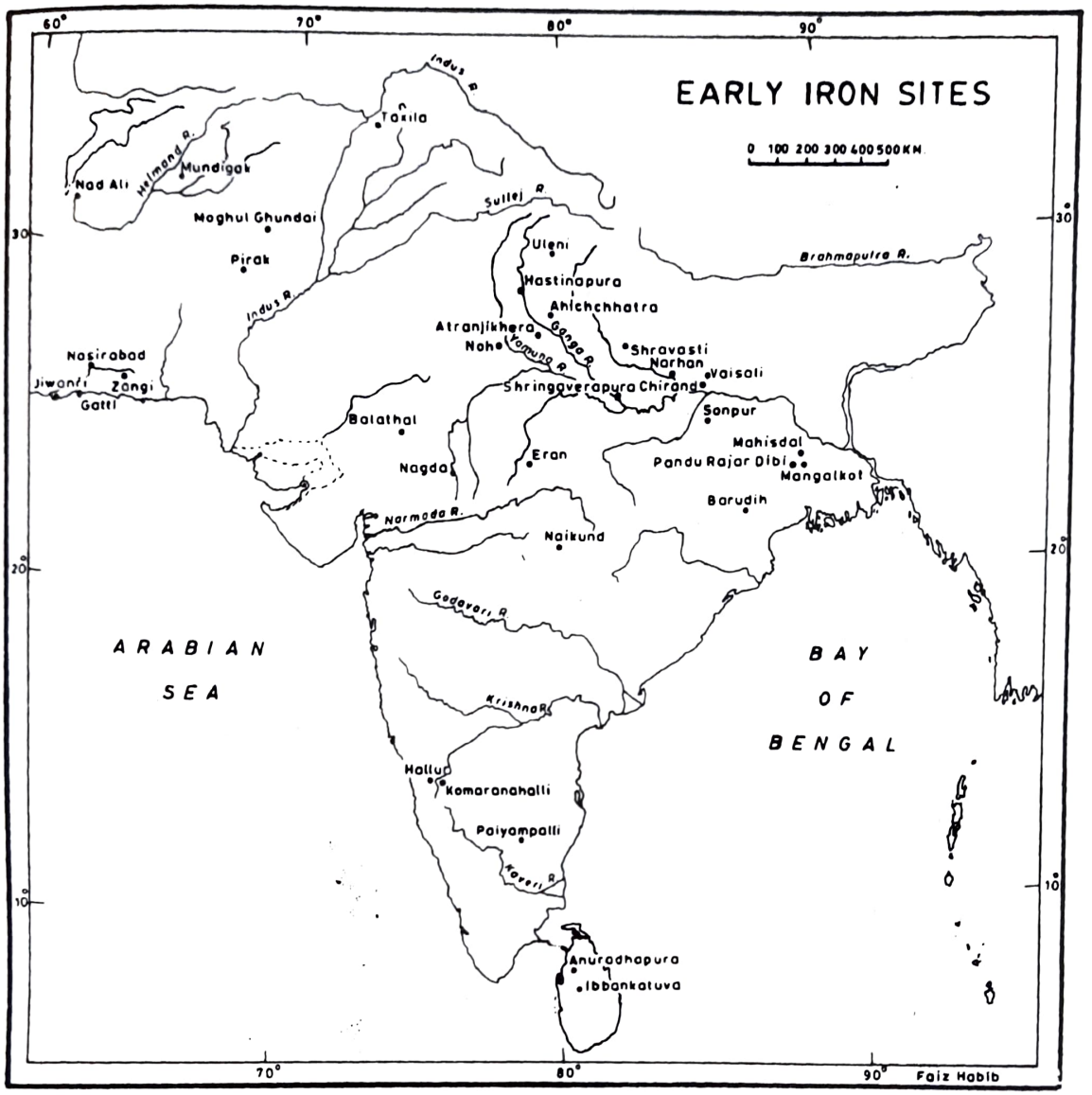
Some of the archaeological evidence for the earliest occurrences of iron in India has already been discussed in *The Vedic Age* (Chapter 3.3). The tendency to date the occurrence of iron very early on the basis of stray carbon dates (while rejecting similar late stray dates), or of a misreading of the strata to which the iron pieces belong, needs to be cautioned against. Thus the date 1200–1000 BC given for the layer of iron at Atranjikhera (western Uttar Pradesh) is far out of the range of *c.* 640–400 BC for the Painted Grey Ware phase (from which the iron comes) at that site derived from other carbon dates. Similarly, there have been some doubts entertained about the occurrence of iron in the post-neolithic and/or chalcolithic levels at Hallur in Karnataka and central India (Ahar and Nagda). Somewhat muddled stratigraphy of these sites accounts for this scepticism. A single radiocarbon date from the chalcolithic phase in Hatigra in West Bengal has led to the dating of the advent of low carbon steel there to around 1000 BC. However, five dates assigned to the 'Early Iron Age' layers from the same site range between such late dates as AD 385 and 990, and dates for low carbon steel from other places are not earlier than the sixth century BC.

The following are some of the notable Iron Age sites (see also *Map 1.1*).

Northern India

Atranjikhera: Period III (which, as has been explained already, should be placed within *c.* 640–400 BC) saw a growing assemblage of iron tools compared to copper ones; and this was maintained

MAP 1.1 Early Iron Sites



in the NBPW (Northern Black Polished Ware) phase which followed Period III.

Hastināpura: The layer following Period II, yielding NBPW shards (sixth–third centuries BC) turned up 126 iron objects, including arrows, chisels and a sickle, along with some copper implements.

Kaushāmbi: Iron noted in NBP levels, where iron arrow-heads came to light together with those made of bone.

Central India

Nagda: The layers of Period II (post-chalcolithic) contained the so-called Black-and-Red Ware as well as 59 iron objects: an axe,

arrow-heads, a dagger, knives, sickles, rings, a spoon and nails (approximate dating, 700–500 BC). Period III (*c.* 500–300 BC) yielded rich iron equipment comprising 130 objects such as daggers, arrows, knives, sickles, chisels, hoes, bowls, nails, etc.

Tripuri (near Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh): Iron observed in levels of about the fourth century BC.

Ujjain (Madhya Pradesh): Iron artefacts were relatively frequent from 500 BC onwards. In addition, traces of smiths' activities were observed within the fortified area. A hearth lined with clay and iron slags suggests local production. The presence of iron ore in the deposits points to the extraction of iron, but no furnaces or bloomeries have been discovered.

The Deccan

Prakash in the Tapti valley (district Dhulia, Maharashtra): Its Period II, dated by the excavator (B.K.Thapar) to between *c.* 600 and 300 BC, is significant for a considerable number of iron objects (spearheads, arrows, knives, chisels and various mountings). About 24 pieces belong to deposits preceding the arrival of NBPW. To the later phase of the same period belong iron adze blades very closely resembling flat stone implements. Bahal and Tekwada (east Khandesh, Maharashtra) also yielded iron daggers, knives, spears and sickles that are ascribed to the same period.

Northwestern India

Rairh (eastern Rajasthan): Here were brought to light a considerable assortment of iron objects including arms (swords, daggers, arrows, spears and lances), tools (sickles, axes, adzes) and components of building material (nails, door-fittings, chains)—all dated to about 300 BC. However, this date was suggested by K.N. Puri, the excavator, in the late 1930s, when scientific dating methods such as 14C were not available. Special mention must be made of objects considered by the excavators to be iron tubes.

Ropar or Rupar (district Ambala, Punjab): assortment of iron knives, daggers, sickles, spears, spikes, hooks, rods and nails.

Taxila, Bhir Mound, founded around 500 BC, has yielded the blade of an iron dagger, 24 cm in length.

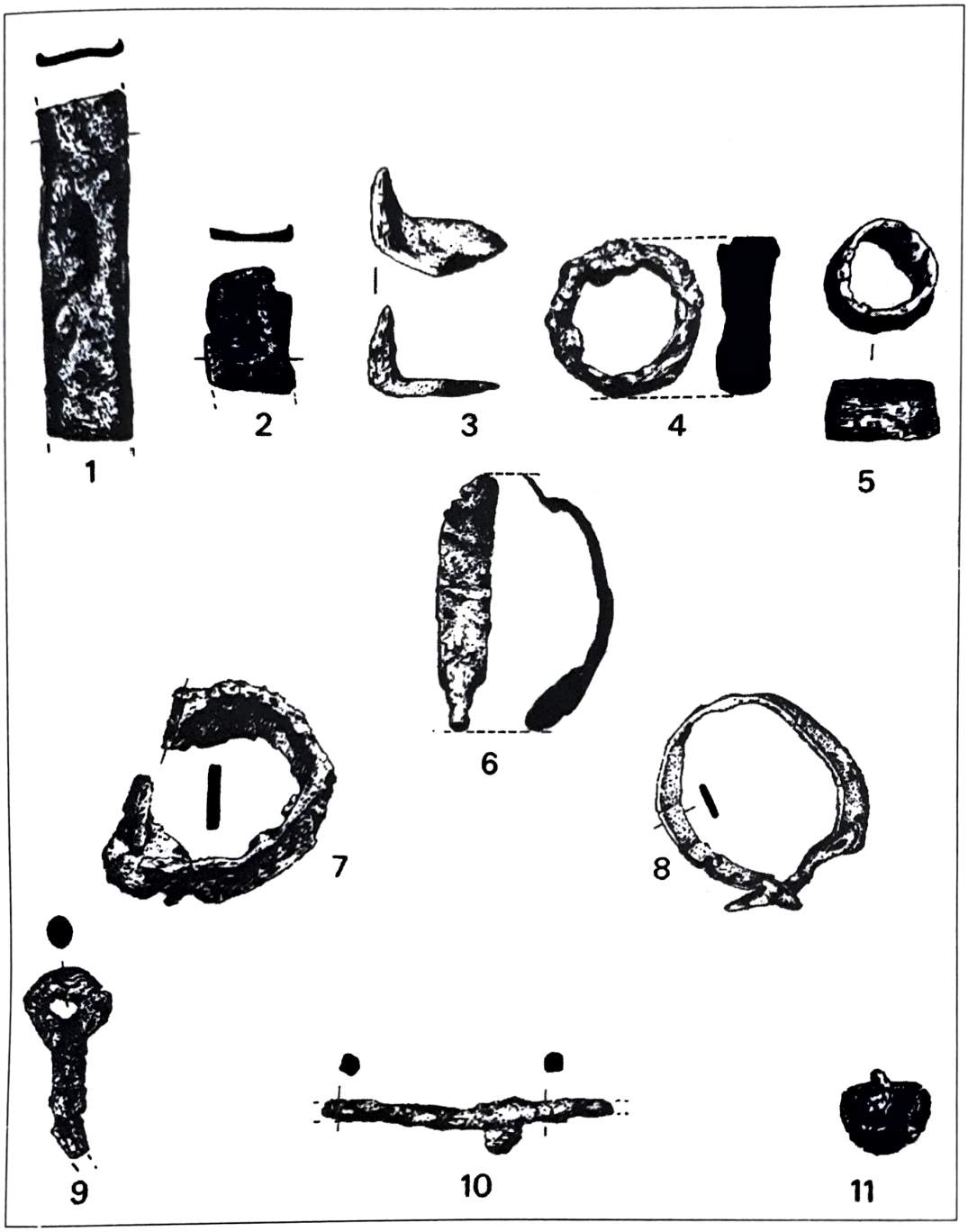


FIGURE 1.1 Iron tools at Atranjikhera, NBPW Phase. The tools have been identified as: Nos 1—3: Clamps; Nos 4—5: Ring fasteners; Nos 6—8: Sockets; No. 9: Staple; No. 10: Bolt; No. 11: Plumb-bob.
Note: Some of the tools here illustrated could belong to Mauryan times.
(After R.C. Gaur)

Tepe Mundigak, Afghanistan: Stratum VII (700–600 BC) shows frequent occurrences of iron.

Gujarat

Timbarva (Baroda, Gujarat): Iron objects were uncovered from the first period (marked by BRW or Black-and-Red Ware) as well as from the later phase of the NBPW period.

Kathiawar (Gujarat): In all, about 369 'early historic' or 'Iron Age' sites are known from this region. The settlement phase, falling between *c.* 800 and 300 BC at Bharuch and Nagal (on the north and south of the Narmada estuary respectively) and at Nagara (Cambay), both outside Kathiawar, is marked by sparing use of iron and paucity of material remains. However, the succeeding level (300 BC to the beginning of the Christian era) at Bharuch, as well as at the Kathiawar sites of Prabhaspatan, Timbarva, Jokha and Vadnagar, is characterized by a greater use of iron, the occurrence of NBPW, fortification, ramparts and burnt-brick structures. A greater variety of minerals were now in use than before (lead for ornaments, rock-crystal and garnet for beads), glass was introduced, and punch-marked coins also made their appearance. Prolific activity in shells, semi-precious stones and iron is also to be inferred. The beginning of the Iron Age in Kathiawar has been tentatively put around 800–700 BC. Dispersal of the NBPW from north India has been postulated.

Eastern India

Sites such as Maner, Taradih, Khairadih, Chirand, Narhan and Sonpur highlight the difference between the neolithic–chalcolithic phase and the Iron–NBPW phase at the same places, in respect of craft goods. In the chalcolithic phase, the total number of iron objects at these six sites is only 20, including slag, but the corresponding number in the Iron–NBPW phase is 352. Copper objects in the chalcolithic phase number 22, but rise to 175 in the Iron–NBPW phase. Bone objects at all except one of the six sites in the neolithic–chalcolithic phase number 162, but are as many as 741 in the Iron–NBPW phase. Semi-precious stone objects: 44 in the neolithic–chalcolithic phase, but 169 in the Iron–NBPW phase. Stone objects: 137 in first phase, but 250 in the Iron–NBPW phase. Ivory and glass goods also increase in number

along with the use of iron implements. At Sonpur (Gaya, Bihar), iron knives and nails were found with NBPW shards; some stone axes too were found. At the recently excavated site of Agiabir on the left bank of the Ganga in district Mirzapur in eastern Uttar Pradesh, the levels of Period II (pre-NBPW) (900–600 BC) and Period III (NBPW culture) (600–200 BC) contained the following copper, iron and bone objects.

> Copper: Period II: 04; Period III: 20 (10 vessels, wires, antimony rods, bangles, earrings, pendant, etc.)
> Iron: Period II: 35; Period III: 73, comprising 15 nails, 12 chisels, 5 knives, 8 spearheads, 2 swords, 1 lamp stand (1.07 metre long)—which is unique, for such lamps have not been found from any other earlier site in India—and 28 objects of indeterminate use.
> Bone Points: Period II: 58; Period III: 108

In the face of the challenge from iron, even the copper industry registered improvements, and during the NBPW culture in the middle Ganga plains, it shows numerical and item-wise increase compared to the earlier period. Iron also helped to change manufacturing methods. Moulds of the copper phase could be dispensed with in many cases. For example, in the case of arrow-heads, the edges of an iron sheet could be turned to hold the shaft.

The above survey of archaeological evidence of iron from different parts of northern India shows that the crucial period of penetration of iron into the material culture of northern India is about 800–500 BC (see *Table 1.1*). There are difficulties in dating many of the objects, but the assumption that iron weapons came first and production tools later, towards the end of the period, seems quite probable. To the sixth, fifth and fourth centuries BC belongs the true Iron Age, marking the rapid spread of iron-use. How iron could now give a versatility to the shapes of tools is illustrated in *Figure 1.1*, which offers a sample of iron tools found in the NBPW phase at Atranjikhera (western Uttar Pradesh).

1.2 Iron Age in Peninsular India

The south Indian Iron Age cultures were characterized by the use of iron, Black-and-Red Ware, and burials marked by large stones ('megaliths'). (See *The Vedic Age*, Chapter 3.2, pp. 83–85.) They are

largely placed between 1000 and 300 BC. The increase in the size and number of settlements, including cemetery sites, during this period, over those of the preceding neolithic–chalcolithic phase, points towards the employment of more successful adaptive strategies. It also implies a degree of demographic expansion.

Iron was used in some abundance in Vidarbha's megalithic culture, as shown by its occurrence at Naikund where carbon dates range from 800 to 400 BC. Carbon and thermoluminiscence dates put the date of first occurrences of iron at Hallur and Kumaranahalli in Karnataka at about 1000 BC, if not earlier, but the dates at other places in the peninsula are much later. However, carbon dates suggest that iron-use at Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka could go back to as early as 800 BC and, certainly, to 600 BC.

A recent survey of the archaeology of Tamil Nadu shows distinct changes during the Iron Age with the emergence of new settlements almost everywhere. In the northern districts, 640 out of 830 sites, i.e. about three-fourths, belong to the Iron Age. Arguing against the usual perception that the megalithic folks were mostly pastoral tribes leading a nomadic life, Y. Subbarayalu suggests that the construction of the impressive burial monuments (*Figure 1.2*) presupposes an understanding of the topography and ecological features of the area. Besides the funerary goods comprising iron tools, the variety of pottery, beads, etc., indicate the utilization of local resources by specialized craftsmen. Taken together, they bear testimony to some sort of sedentary life. Admittedly, this may have happened more markedly in the later stages (fifth century BC onwards) when the megalithic folks moved towards the riverine plains and diversified their pattern of resource use, cultivating a larger number of crops.

The megalithic people practised a mixed economy based on agro-pastoral production. Axes, ploughshares (at more than a dozen sites), hoes (also at about a dozen sites), sickles, spades, etc., reported from numerous sites attest the use of iron implements in agricultural operations. Inter-regional exchange networks are likely to have developed, as shown by the occurrence of non-local prestige goods, such as gold, lapis lazuli and marine shells at some sites. As in the case of north India, here too, there is evidence of chronological precedence of iron weapons (285 weapons in 92 burials) over tools of the same metal for

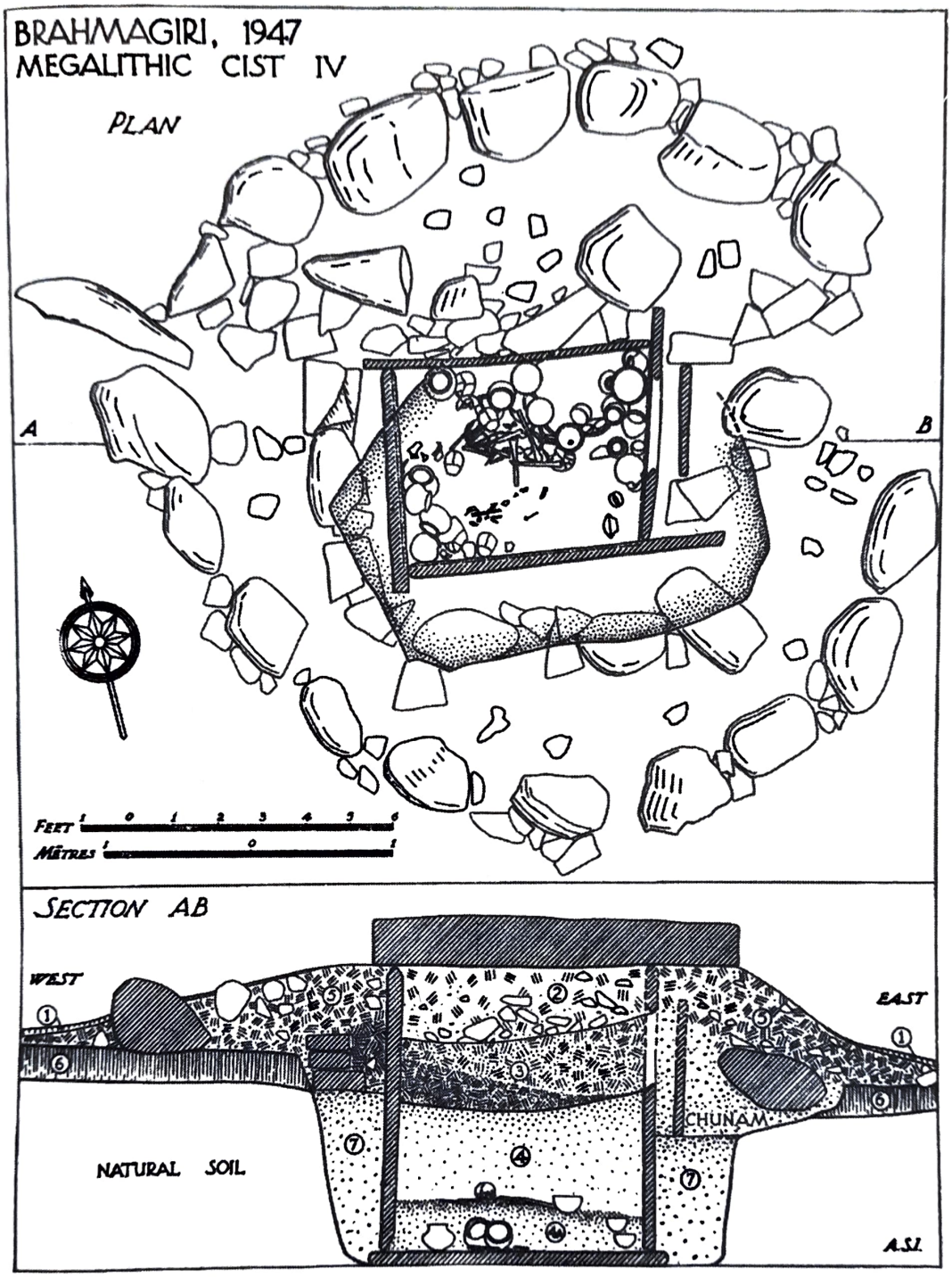


FIGURE 1.2 Megalithic burial at Brahmagiri (Karnataka): plan and section
(After R.E.M. Wheeler)

use in agriculture and crafts (evidence of metallurgical practices at 85 sites).

Locational analysis of over 1,900 south Indian megaliths (including those of Vidarbha) shows that most of the larger settlements are located on 'the known major trade and communication routes of early historic India', and are distributed in varied geographical zones, some of which are agriculturally fertile areas. Warfare appears to have increased during this period, probably to control resource-rich zones, if large aggregations of warriors' graves in some of these resource-rich zones (for example, in Wainganga basin, Raichur region, middle Krishna valley, Kolar region and Coimbatore uplands) are any indication. A case has also been made for the megaliths' indicating the emergence of a ranked society. But not all remains can be dated satisfactorily. Some of the 1,900-odd megalithic sites may possibly date from 1000 BC, but some could belong to the early centuries AD as well.

1.3 Agriculture

A scrutiny of literary texts gives us considerable information about the agricultural production and technologies of the period.

The *Vinaya Piṭaka* shows the peasants' knowledge of the crops to be fairly considerable. The *Chullavagga*, a part of this collection, demarcates clearly the various stages of peasants' activities such as *kasi* (ploughing), *vāpitam* (sowing), *udakaṃ abhinetabbaṃ* (irrigation), *niddhapetabbaṃ* (weeding out of undesirable plants), *lavāpetabbaṃ* (reaping) and *o puṇāpetabbaṃ* (winnowing). Apart from the plough and sickle, other agricultural implements mentioned include *kudāla* (spade), and digging tools such as *khaṇitti* and *nikkhadana*. Agricultural crops referred to in Pali texts include cereals and pulses, such as varieties of paddy (*vīhi, sāli*), wheat (*godhūma*), barley (*yava*), millet (*kaṅgu*), beans (*varaka*), rye (*kudrusaka*), oats (*vilaṅga*), lintels (*mugga* and *māsa*) and sesame (*tila*). Sugarcane is put in the *phalabīja* class of plants, i.e. those propagated from joints. *Phaṇita* (treacle or molasses) is said to be a product prepared out of it. Varieties of oil mentioned include *tilatela* (sesame oil), *sāsapatela* (mustard oil) and *eraṇḍatela* (castor oil). Amongst fibres, mention is made of *kappāsa* and *tūla* or cotton, *khoma* or flax, and *bhaṅga* or hemp. *Mañjiṭṭha* (madder) and *nīli* (indigo) come under dyes. It was clearly understood

that most of the dyes were prepared from the roots, leaves, flowers and fruits of various plants. *Pippali* (long pepper), *maricha* (round pepper), *bhañjanaka* (probably beetroot), *palāṇḍu* (onion), *haliddi* (turmeric), *sigivera* (ginger), and *lasuṇa* or *ativisa* or *māgadhaka* (garlic) come under spices and edible roots.

We read in the Jaina *āgamas* that agricultural land (*khetta*), considered as the most important material possession, was of two types: (i) '*setu*' (meaning 'dam'), which required irrigation and (ii) '*ketu*', dependent on rainfall alone. References to dams (*setu*) occur in the *Dharmashāstras* and the *Arthashāstra* as well. The *Uvāsagadasāo* tells us about Ānanda, a rich merchant and an agriculturist, who, in order to put a check on his external possessions, limited his cultivable land to five hundred ploughs, each one ploughing one hundred *niyattanas* of land! The *Nāyādhammakahāo* mentions transplantation (of rice?) being done twice or thrice in order to get a good yield.

The *Brihatkapla Bhāshya* tells us that while rainfall was the main source of water supply in Lāṭa *desha* (Gujarat and western India), the fields were irrigated from rivers in Sindhu (northwestern India), from ponds in Draviḍa (southern India) and from wells in the Uttarāpatha (northern India). In some cases, flood waters were also utilized.

Harvested corn was stored with great care. It was kept in *koṭṭhāgāras* (granaries) made of straw, bamboo, grasses, etc., on an elevated platform or on the upper storey of the house. It was covered with cowdung on all sides, closed and completely sealed up with mud so that the grain might be long preserved. The *Bhagavatī* informs us that such storage period could range from one to seven years—cereal seeds could be kept for three years; seeds of pulses for five years; and oilseeds such as *alsi* (linseed) and *sārshapa* (mustard) for seven years.

Several varieties of rice, pulses, wheat, millet, oilseeds, fibre crops, spices, fruits, bamboos (*chavavams*, *veṇu*, *kanaka*, *kakkavaṃsa*, *vāruvaṃsa*, etc.), vegetables, and other crops like sugarcane and gram, are mentioned in the Jaina texts. Besides being grown in orchards, fruits were gathered from jungles and carried to cities for sale.

Mention of the *plāshuka* variety of *vrīhi* or paddy in the *Shatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (possibly datable to around 700 BC) is a possible reference to a transplanted variety which ripens quickly. In the post-Vedic texts, the transplanted variety is generally known as *shāli*. Paddy

transplantation also figures prominently in Pali and Prakrit texts. Paddy, through broadcasting, ripened after ten months, whereas after transplantation it took only six months to ripen.

Reasonable corroboration of such an understanding about advances attained in agriculture is obtained from archaeological finds. From *c.* 1500 BC onwards, the main cereals were known in several parts of the mid-Ganga basin (see list of crops known *c.* 1500 BC in *The Indus Civilization*, Chapter 3.1, p. 78). In the tenth–eighth centuries BC, Narhan (east Uttar Pradesh) shows rice, barley, three forms of wheat, pea, green gram, chick pea, sesame and *khesāri* (*Lethyrus sativus*). Seeds of mustard and flax or *alsi* came from wild plants. Jackfruit was also known. One Narhan trench shows the use of cultivated rice, barley, bread-wheat, black gram, gram, pea, *khesāri*, *kodo*, millet and sesame in 500–400 BC. Between 700 and 200 BC, evidence for rice, barley, wheat, green gram or *mung*, gram, chick pea, pea and *khesāri* has been found in Khairadih. Several important additions are made to this list in the texts. Sugarcane and mustard, for example, are mentioned in the Pali and Sanskrit texts.

While finds of ploughshares and hoes made of iron from various sites in the Indian subcontinent have been mentioned above, the existence of a large rain-fed reservoir of the NBPW period at Ropar suggests the use of irrigation tanks, corroborating our textual evidence.

Rearing of cattle and other animals continued to be a major accompaniment of agriculture. The pre-NBPW people seem to have reared cattle mainly for meat, which formed the principal item in their food. Bones of cattle and other animals bearing cut-marks have been found at Sonpur, Khajuri, Narhan and several other places. These belong to both pre-NBPW times and to later periods. Numerous charred bones of cattle and other animals have been found at Narhan. Those from Pataliputra in the NBPW phase show the majority of the people to be meat eaters. However, the needs of agriculture also demanded the preservation of cattle wealth (*Suttanipāta*), to which more attention was paid by the new religious sects (see Chapter 4).

1.4 Other Aspects of Material Culture

The habitation area of the Iron–NBPW phase is usually larger at most sites than that of the pre-Iron–NBPW phase. In the Maner

mound the NBPW area spreads over 1 sq. km, and in Chirand it measures 1 km x 125 m and is nearly three times the neolithic–chalcolithic area. In Champa the NBPW area measures seven to eight times the chalcolithic spread. The widespread use of wheels (both solid and spoked) and carts in the iron-using cultures of the mid-Ganga plains contrasts with their near-absence in the chalcolithic cultures of this area. Thus in the NBPW period in the mid-Ganga plains, pedestrian or pack animal transport was reinforced by cart transport, which became more efficient because of the use of spokes in the wheels.

The largest number of terracotta human figurines in ancient India are found from *c.* 600 BC onwards. It is from the pre-NBPW or early NBPW levels that we gradually begin to get such figurines at Ahichchhatra, Rajghat, Buxar, Pataliputra, Chirand, Kaushāmbi, Mathura, etc. These are crudely hand-modelled and the use of punching technique is noticeable. As there was a remarkable uniformity in the art of clay-modelling covering much of the area from Taxila to sites in eastern India, the evidence of Ahichchhatra may be regarded as typical. Before *c.* 300 BC, hand-modelled figurines of the so-called mother goddesses seem to have been quite prevalent.

A large variety of terracotta animal figurines are also encountered in the NBPW levels. The elephant, bull, horse, ram, dog, monkey, *nāgī*, etc., gradually begin to appear at numerous towns of the Ganga valley. The *nāgī* figurines which also occur in the pre-NBPW levels at certain sites of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh are stylized, and have a snake-like hood and a human female body. They are hand-made, and bear punched and incised marks to show the navel, girdle, etc. A lustrous polish, as on the NBPW, is also seen on some of these figurines. Some of them are profusely decorated as if they were ceremonial animals. The decoration consists of applied bands, punch-marked and incised circlets, rosette motifs, and, in some cases, even stamped leaf motifs as on the mother goddess figurines. Some elephant and horse figurines have riders attached to them. At Mathura some of the elephant figurines are hollow, produced on a wheel, and have applied tail and trunk. The elephants of Buxar are noteworthy in that they bear painted vertical stripes.

Among toilet objects, antimony rods have so far not been reported from any site till the period marking the emergence of the NBPW. Apart from the plain kohl sticks of copper with either both ends

or one end rounded, specimens with either one end decorated or shaped for use as ear-cleaner or tooth-pick, and decorated in the middle, have also been found. Masaon (district Ghazipur, Uttar Pradesh) yielded copper mirrors. Combs from the NBPW levels, all of ivory, have been found at Pandu Rajar Dhibi, Oriup (near Bhagalpur, Bihar), Ropar, Ujjain, Nagda (district Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh), Nagal and Prakash (district Dhule, Maharashtra). Many of these are decorated with circlets and concentric circles. Examples of toilet caskets of bone, ivory, steatite, soapstone, etc., are fairly common. It can only be surmised that the steatite and soapstone caskets from Noh, Sugh and Sambhar were used for holding cosmetic materials, unlike the caskets found at Buddhist sites where these were used as reliquaries.

The literature refers to several types of arrow-heads, such as *ardhachandra* (crescentric), *kshurapra* (razor-edged) and *suchi-mukha* (needle-headed). Three main types of iron arrow-heads have been found in central and north India (Kaushāmbi, Hastināpura and Ujjain), as well as in the Deccan (Bahal, Ter and Maheshwar) in levels of the second half of the first millennium BC: (i) tanged and leaf-shaped, (ii) tanged and bud-shaped with circular section, and (iii) multi-bladed. Bone arrow-heads have also been located in levels datable to between *c.* 750 and *c.* 250 BC. A bone arrow from Ropar has been called 'stylus' (writing instrument). Incidentally, bone and ivory styli have been reported from Kayatha in the upper Chambal valley (western Madhya Pradesh).

The best known examples of masks after those of the Harappan times are of the early historical period, and among them the earliest is the terracotta mask found in the NBPW levels of Chirand. This mask is perhaps the only example of a life-size mask found so far and shows a 'fierce-looking human face with protruding teeth'.

From the fifth century BC, gamesmen prepared in bone, ivory or terracotta became widespread in the Ganga valley, and central and western India. They are of uniform yet simple shapes, consisting of circular discs, flat at the bottom and on the upper side with a raised boss surrounded by concentric circles in the centre, or are solid cylinders, square or hexagonal tablets. Some have perforations on top for threading. Quite a few are painted or decorated with symbols, and those of stone and ivory are polished. Terracotta discs, possibly used as hop-

scotches, occur in the NBPW levels at Ayodhya, Hastināpura, Masaon, Prahladpur and many other sites in the Ganga valley.

Most of the sites in the northern region have produced a rich collection of beads from various levels. For the period 600–300 BC Shrāvastī has produced by far the most significant examples, which include, among others, 'eye beads' of stratified glass, leach-shaped beads of agate, cylinder beads of lapis lazuli, axe amulets of carnelian, dagger pendants of clay and shell, and cornerless cube beads of jasper.

Although glass bangles are reported from a late PGW (Painted Grey Ware) level of Hastināpura, interesting evidence comes from the early levels of Shrāvastī datable to *c.* 600–300 BC, when bangles, exclusively of green and blue glass, are found in large numbers. Green glass was used mainly for bracelets.

Champā, famous for its jewellery in early Pali texts and some Jaina *āgamas*, has yielded more than a dozen of jewellers' stone moulds from its early NBPW strata.

Wells and ring-wells have so far not been reported from any site belonging to the chalcolithic cultures other than the Indus culture. Wells are, indeed, again reported only from sites dated to *c.* 500 BC and later. Significantly enough, ring-wells also make their appearance around this period: brick-lined wells were found at NBPW levels at Ujjain and Prahladpur.

Ring-wells, so called because of the lining with terracotta rings, are sometimes identified as soak-pits (relatively shallow), draw-wells (reasonably deep), or privies, or even granaries. These show a large area of distribution, extending from Shahbazgarhi in the north-west to Arikamedu in the south and to Mahasthangarh in the east. The maximum occurrence of ring-wells is in the Ganga–Yamuna doab with a lesser concentration in the Taxila region in the northwest and in the western Deccan. Their presence in the rest of the area in central India and the east coast is sporadic. (The earliest examples are not earlier than the fifth century BC and are almost coeval with the NBPW.)

The most characteristic feature of the ring-wells is the use of terracotta rings inside a circular shaft to forestall the collapse of the sides. Generally the rings have a uniform diameter from bottom to top, varying between 46 cm and 1.37 m. Apart from ring-wells composed entirely of terracotta rings from bottom to top, there are also examples

of ring-wells lined with wedge-shaped brick and terracotta rings respectively on the top and lower portions, as at Bhita, or wells cut into hard marl and riveted with pottery rings only on the lower portion, as at Charsadda. The present evidence shows ring-wells reaching to a depth varying between 31 cm and 7 m, the number of rings ranging between 2 and 47; in some cases the bottom of the wells could not be reached, as at Hastināpura.

The early NBPW levels of Ahichchhatra, Noh, Purana Qila (Delhi), Sambhar and Vaishali have yielded two- and four-armed multiple ovens in mud-floored kitchens.

Wood remains of deodar (*Cedrus deodara* Loudon), laurel (*Terminalia tomentosa* W & A), *jhau* (*Tamarix* sp) and *devi diar* (*Cupressus Torulosa* D. Don) have been found at Atranjikhera.

1.5 Iron and Production of Surplus

Amidst speculations about the antiquity of iron in India, where the pendulum has swung between the two extremes of *c.* 1200 BC and *c.* 400 BC, the wider acceptance now of the date 800–700 BC for the beginning of the Iron Age in the Ganga basin puts the relationship between iron and social change in a better defined context. On the substantive question of the link between iron and increase in production, views have ranged equally widely. While some have stressed the revolutionary potential of iron technology immediately after its introduction (as D.D. Kosambi did in the 1950s and 60s), others (e.g., D.K. Chakrabarti) have asserted that the idea of extensive use of iron tools and clearance of forests by these for agriculture and settlements is not to be taken as an established fact. Chakrabarti's main contention is that there were no major additions to the list of domesticated plants and animals during the Iron Age. It must, however, be underlined that if the real role of technological advancement in the generation of surplus is to be properly understood, changes in the method of cultivation (for example, paddy transplantation) and craft production (introduction of bellows) are decidedly more important than a mere listing of crops.

Erdosy recognizes the importance of iron in the colonizing of the Ganga plains and the spread of agriculture (he goes even to the extent of suggesting that the technological base of the economy in the period between the sixth–fourth centuries BC was already at a level not

significantly exceeded until the twentieth century!), but he nevertheless questions the catalytic role of iron in creating conditions for the rise of the state and cities in that area. He attributes the production of larger surplus to the intensive use of the existing tools, gradual reduction of the fallow period through double cropping and other methods, and to the increasing demand for surplus by a stratified society. However, it must be realized that two harvests in a year were only seldom raised from the same land (the large extent of double-cropped area is a relatively recent phenomenon), and so the duration of the fallow period remained unaffected. Moreover, the efficiency and abundance of iron tools had its own effect on ploughing as well as harvesting. The quantitative data about the relative position of tools in the neolithic–chalcolithic phases, on the one hand, and those of the Iron–NBPW phase, on the other, at several sites in the Ganga plains (as delineated above) is enough to show that the notion of 'intensive use of the existing tools' in agriculture in the pre-Iron–NBPW phase is quite imaginary. Simply put, it was iron that immensely increased the efficiency of tools.

The origin of the state and well-stratified societies in the mid-Ganga basin cannot be dated prior to the use of iron in agricultural production. Work done on settlement archaeology in the western peripheries of the mid-Ganga plains underlines the unequal sizes of settlements. How precisely social differentiation is linked to settlement sizes in the mid-Ganga plains still needs to be worked out. The finds of large nucleated villages which appeared in the doab area of Allahabad district in 1000–600 BC (Erdosy) are confined to a two-tiered settlement hierarchy and suggest a simple political structure. The real distinction between settlements appears with the construction of forts in the mid-Ganga plains around 500 BC. The role of iron implements of war in this development may not have been insignificant.

The earliest trace of a fortified settlement has been found at Kankarbagh (Patna). The wooden palisades discovered there in the course of digging for drainage carry seven calibrated carbon dates ranging from *c.* 720 BC to 550 BC. These wooden logs (now in the custody of the Patna Museum), which are thirteen in number and in their present condition range in height from 3 m 49 cm to 2 m 16 cm, suggest fenced settlements, which may have been used by local chiefs or village

communities for defence. If it is to be believed that the state was based on privileged interest groups living on gifts, taxes and tribute, a prior substantial increase in production and settlements cannot be ruled out. The view that the chalcolithic tools (with copper as a very expensive metal) alone could produce such a large surplus in the Ganga plains is surely unrealistic.

Notwithstanding the limited marshalling of empirical archaeological evidence (marked especially by an absence of comprehensive cataloguing of iron-yielding sites with quantitative and qualitative details of strata-wise distribution of iron objects and their metallographic analyses), the long-term transformative potentialities inherent in the introduction of iron technology need to be recognized. For example, considerable advantages must have been gained from the socketed iron axe, and from the addition of an iron share to the wooden plough and hoe in breaking clumps and in weeding. Similarly, the metal's role in influencing other technological developments, given the various shapes in which iron could be fitted into other tools, must be kept in view. As iron-use extended, it must also have stimulated commerce by the transport trade in iron (from its mines) that would now develop.

On the whole, there seems to be little doubt that by the beginning of our period, i.e. *c.* 700 BC, the industrial use of iron had begun, and by the middle of our period, i.e. around 500 BC, its presence in producing functional tools of production was also gaining the status of an almost indispensable factor for the increase in the size of surplus produced within the economy.

1.6 Metal Money

In the *Vinaya Piṭaka* we are told:

> And when Anāthapiṇḍaka [the merchant] had arrived at Sāvatthi, he examined all the region round about it, saying: 'Where shall I fix the place for the Blessed One [the Buddha] to stay in, not too far from the town and not too near, convenient for going and for coming, easily accessible for all who wish to visit him, by day not too crowded, by night, not exposed to too much noise and alarm, protected from the wind, hidden from men, well fitted for a retired life?'

> And Anāthapiṇḍaka saw that the Jetavana of Kumāra had all these advantages. He went to Kumāra and said to him: 'Sir, let me have your garden to make an *ārāma* [hermitage] on it.'
>
> 'It is not, Sir, for sale, even for a sum so great that pieces of money would be sufficient to cover it if they were laid side by side.'
>
> 'I take, Sir, the garden at the price', said Anāthapiṇḍaka.

Similar transactions are mentioned elsewhere. To physician Jīvaka, a *gahapati* of Sāketa gives 16,000 coins. In another instance, a *gahapati* of Banaras (Varanasi) gave 16,000 *kahāpaṇas* to Jīvaka for curing his son. A *seṭṭhi–gahapati* of Rājagaha, for his brain surgery, gave 100,000 coins to the king and 100,000 to Jīvaka. When a *seṭṭhi–gahapati* died without any heir to his property, king Pasenadi obtained a very substantial amount in gold and silver worth 100,000 *kahāpaṇas*.

FIGURE 1.3 'Anāthapeḍiko, having purchased Jetavana for a layer of crores (*koṭi*) [of coins]' (inscribed label): Bharhut sculpture (second century BC)
(Reprod. B. Barua)

In all these cases, the figures are patently exaggerated to the degree of fantasy, but they imply money's deep penetration of the economy. The transition from a barter system to a money economy would now seem to have been largely completed, except, perhaps, for internal village transactions. The emergence of the new market relations was reflected in the attitude of a shopkeeper in Sāvatthi:

> An *upāsaka* (lay worshipper of the Buddha), having bought ghee for a *kahāpaṇa* from the house of a certain shopkeeper, gives it to nun Thullanandā. She says that she was in need of oil and not ghee. The *upāsaka* goes to the shopkeeper and tells him to give in exchange the oil for the ghee. The shopkeeper replies: 'If we take back again goods that were bought, when will our goods be sold? Ghee was taken owing to the purchase of ghee; give money for the purchase of oil and you shall take oil.' (*Vinaya Piṭaka*)

The shift to cash nexus, which could be one of the most significant economic developments of our period, is corroborated by numismatic evidences as well. Hundreds of thousands of specimens of punch-marked coins have been collected from practically all over India (see *Note 1.1*). In our period their finds have been confined to northern India, while in Afghanistan, to judge from the find spots, Achaemenid and even Athenian coins circulated (*Map 1.2*). Appearing in about the sixth–fifth centuries BC, they continued to be in circulation for more than five hundred years, being minted in mainly silver (later in silver alloyed with copper) and sometimes in copper. The *kahāpaṇa* was their basic unit. Sculptural remains such as those found at Bharhut (second century BC) depict the story of the purchase of Jetavana by Anāthapiṇḍaka as recounted above (*Figure 1.3*); so it is an early tradition. The availability of money was a potent factor that must have greatly facilitated economic transactions. The situation was therefore quite conducive to trade (see 1.7 and 1.8 below).

The discovery of a hoard of 3,000 cowrie shells from the NBPW levels at Masaon also throws interesting light on the early use of this popular low-value currency, which remained in circulation in India till as late as the nineteenth century.

1.7 Trade

Vāṇijja is the term for commercial or trading activities, and occurs together with terms for agriculture and cattle-keeping. At one place the Buddha compares agriculture (*kasi*) with trading (*vāṇijja*) thus:

> Agriculture is an occupation where there is a great deal to do; agriculture requires constant care and supervision and is full of uncertainties and problems, many duties, large administration and great problems, which, if succeeded in, yields great profit. On the other hand, trading involves far fewer duties, administration and problems; and yet a successful venture brings in great profit. (*Majjhima Nikāya*)

The shopkeeper, it was said, must have three characteristics—shrewdness, capability and ability to inspire confidence. Passages on the conduct of businessmen and their ethics are frequent: if a man starts an enterprise after contracting a loan and if his business succeeds, he should not only be able to pay off the old debt he had incurred, but there should be a surplus over it to maintain a wife. An ideal man of business is thus described by the Buddha:

> The wise and moral man shines like a fire on a hill-top, making money like the bee which does not hurt the flower. Such a man makes his pile as an anthill, gradually. The man grown wealthy thus can help his family and firmly binds his friends to himself. He should divide his money into four parts: on one part he should live, with two expand his trade, and the fourth he should save against a rainy day. (*Dīgha Nikāya*)

In a dialogue with Sāriputta (*Aṅguttara Nikāya*), the Buddha commented that there could be four possible outcomes for a person if he engaged in trade (*vāṇijjayutta*): it could end in failure, it could bring less success than expected, it could be as successful as anticipated, and it could yield much in excess of the expected gain. An examination of the Pali texts shows that the *pāpaṇika* (shopkeeper), *kraya-vikrayika* (retail dealer), *vasanika* (investor of money) and *vāṇija* (petty trader) were considered as pursuing distinct lines of business.

Though Buddhist ethics did not consider the pursuit of trade

to be a legitimate occupation for its *upāsakas*, a fairly large segment of the population did pursue trade even in weapons, human beings, animal flesh, intoxicants and poisons. A group of nuns who practised the following trades were prohibited to do so in future: keeping a tavern or a slaughter house, engaging in usury, and dealing in greens and leaves. Obviously, many women outside the nunnery undertook such activities.

Commerce promoted traffic. It can be assumed that the tracks followed by the Buddha and other monks on their journeys were primarily the creations of traders and merchants. The Buddha's journeys between Rājagaha (Rajgir) in Magadha and Kusinārā (district Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh), where he died, passing through Nalanda, Pāṭaligāma (the future Pāṭaliputra), Vesāli, Bhaṇḍagāma, Hatthigāma, Jambugāma, Pāvā, etc., figure conspicuously in Pali texts. Jīvaka, the renowned physician, was also a widely travelled man. He is said to have undertaken a journey from Takkhasīla (Taxila near Rawalpindi, Pakistan) to Bhadraṃkara (Sialkot?), Udumbara (Pathankot?) and Rohitaka (Rohtak). In another narrative, he is said to have travelled from Takkhasīla to Sāketa and then to Rājagaha. To cure king Pradyota of Avanti, Jīvaka went to Ujjayinī (Ujjain) via Kosāmbi (Kaushāmbi). From Sāvatthi, the *gahapati* Anāthapiṇḍaka went to Rājagaha. He also had a *kammantagāma* (farming village) at Kāshī. The entire north India was linked up through the famous Uttarāpatha, the Northern Route, stretching from Rājagaha in the east to Takkhasīla in northwestern India. Pāṇini seems to be aware of this route, which was frequented by caravan traders. We find mention of caravans with 1,000 carts going from one *janapada* (territory) to another. Bharhut stupa sculptures offer an early (second century BC) depiction of a caravan cart with two bullocks (*Figure 1.4*), which might well have been in use in our period.

The *Suttanipāta* account of Bāvarī's journey from Patiṭṭhāna to Sāvatthi amply demonstrates a long overland route passing through Māhissati (Mandhata, district Nimar, Madhya Pradesh), Ujeni (Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh), Vedisā (near Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh), Tumbavana (Tumain in eastern Madhya Pradesh) and Kosāmbi (near Allahabad). This might have been the north–south trunk road of the time.

Jaina texts mention five types of travellers: (i) *bhaṇḍi*: those who carried their goods by carts and wagons; (ii) *bāhilaga*: those who carried their goods by camels, mules and bullocks; (iii) *bhāravāha*:

FIGURE 1.4 A caravan cart, with draught oxen at rest: Bharhut sculpture (second century BC)
(Reprod. B. Barua)

those who carried their own loads; (iv) *odariyā*: wandering people who travelled to earn their livelihood and went from place to place; and, finally, (v) *kappadiya/kapartika*: ascetics. There were caravans which started their journey at sunrise, while others took rest at sunrise (presumably after travelling the whole night). The large caravans could halt at one place for as long as four months, acquiring during that period even the designation of a village (*gāma*).

The Ganga river appears to have facilitated inland riverine communications, as is indicated by several Buddhist stories; and the role of north Indian rivers generally, in providing suitable communication channels, needs also to be borne in mind. Pāṭaliputra (Patna), which grew as a town in our period, doubtless owed much to its proximity to the trijunction of the Ganga, Son and Ghaghara.

1.8 Long-Distance Trade, Crafts and Cities in the Northwest

The country of Porus, the famous opponent of Alexander, is said to have contained 300 cities. We are further apprised by Aristobulus that between the Jhelum and the Beas, the Macedonians conquered nine nations and 5,000 cities, not one of which was less than Kos Meropis (an island in Greece, which today has an area of more than 150 sq km). Such statements are marred by obvious exaggeration, but still attest the existence of an urban milieu in India's northwest in the fourth century BC.

The early Greek accounts also speak of towns established by Alexander and the Greek immigrants. Alexander is said to have established cities named Boukephalia and Nikaia in the kingdom of Porus. He founded another city on the confluence of the Chenab and the Indus. During his expedition in India Alexander came across a town, Nysa, in the Swat valley, whose inhabitants claimed descent from Dionysus, the 'divine Greek conqueror of India' (Arrian). It appears to have been established by the Greek mercenaries who had come to India under the aegis of the Achaeminids.

External trade, a significant factor in urban growth, must have developed as a result of Skylax's 'discovery' of the sea route from the mouth of the Indus during the reign of the Achaemenid king Darius (*c.* 500 BC). Herodotus' statements suggest that Skylax sailed down the Indus and, sailing west along the Arabian Sea coast, ultimately reached Egypt. Besides the land route which Alexander himself followed with his contingent in 325 BC, the voyage made by his commander Nearchus between the Indus delta and the Persian Gulf is of great significance. From Nearchus' descriptions it is supposed that the headland of Mosarna (beyond Gwadar in Pakistan) was probably the intermediate point where Indian goods were handed over to Arabian or Persian middlemen.

The early Greek accounts dealing with northwest India speak of various items of export and the crafts developed in India. In Herodotus' description of the wool-bearing Indian tree used for clothing, we can well recognize a reference to cotton. The celebrated timber of India which repeatedly finds mention in Greek accounts was ebony, which was exported from India to Persia from the sixth century BC

onwards. The companions of Alexander commended the skill of Indian craftsmen in the art of ship-building.

Among the precious stones, onyx occupies a place of distinction. From the excavations at the Bhir Mound strata (fifth–third centuries BC) at Taxila, 752 beads of semi-precious stones have been recovered, including carnelian (417), and agate (191). Then comes the colourless quartz crystal. Other stones common at all the settlements of Taxila but much more sparingly used, were chalcedony, garnet, jasper and lapis-lazuli.

Herodotus mentions Indian mercenaries in the armies of the Iranian emperor Xerxes as distinguishable on account of their cotton uniform and iron-tipped arrows. Among the iron objects discovered by Marshall in the contemporary Bhir Mound strata at Taxila, there were 14 war weapons (including 10 arrow-heads, 2 swords, 1 javelin and 1 spear-head), 3 agricultural implements, 4 household utensils, 1 elephant goad, and 12 carpenter's and blacksmith's tools used for preparing various types of iron objects.

Regarding the source of gold, Herodotus writes that it was obtained in the form of gold dust from a 'desert' near the country of Derdai (in the Himalayas), which was guarded by gold-digging ants. Megasthenes too mentioned gold mines in Dardistan (northern Kashmir). The Bhir Mound at Taxila yielded 27 pieces of gold jewellery; 6 pieces come from the later Buddhist settlements at Dharmarajika, Jaulian and Giri.

Ivory objects from India had become famous in the west from early times. Nearchus refers to earrings of ivory used by rich Indians. Among the ivory objects which have been found at the Bhir Mound are earrings, spindle whorls and draughtmen or counters.

Among other important export items was the Indian purple dye. Ctesias (fifth century BC) has presented for us details of the Indian purple dye which was obtained from two sources—a kind of insect and a specific flower. With the growth of urban culture there emerged a class which became engaged solely in preparing scents and unguents for sophisticated citizens of the cities. Ctesias' account gives the impression that the Persians learnt the use of perfumes from India. He also refers to the Indian cinnamon flowers called 'karpion' (unguent of roses) and the oil that oozes from them. Among some other Indian

products, Ctesias knew of pepper, cocoa-palms, oil obtained from sesame, nut and wine.

Professionals associated with the growth of urban centres in the northwest included physicians, who are disparaged by the *sūtra* texts rooted in ruralism. It was with the emergence of Buddhism and the Jaina system that medical science was developed in India. The Indian technique of healing snake bites was greatly commended by the Macedonians. Filliozat has opined that Indian medicine was made accessible to the Greek world through the Achaemenian empire even before the invasion of Alexander.

Note 1.1

Punch-marked Coins

The numismatic history of India begins from our period, with the minting and use of punch-marked coins. These coins are usually of silver (copper issues are believed to belong to a later phase), remarkably irregular in individual shapes, from roughly rectangular to roughly triangular and roundish, though conforming to definite

FIGURE 1.5 Early punch-marked coins (After P.L. Gupta and T.R. Hardaker)

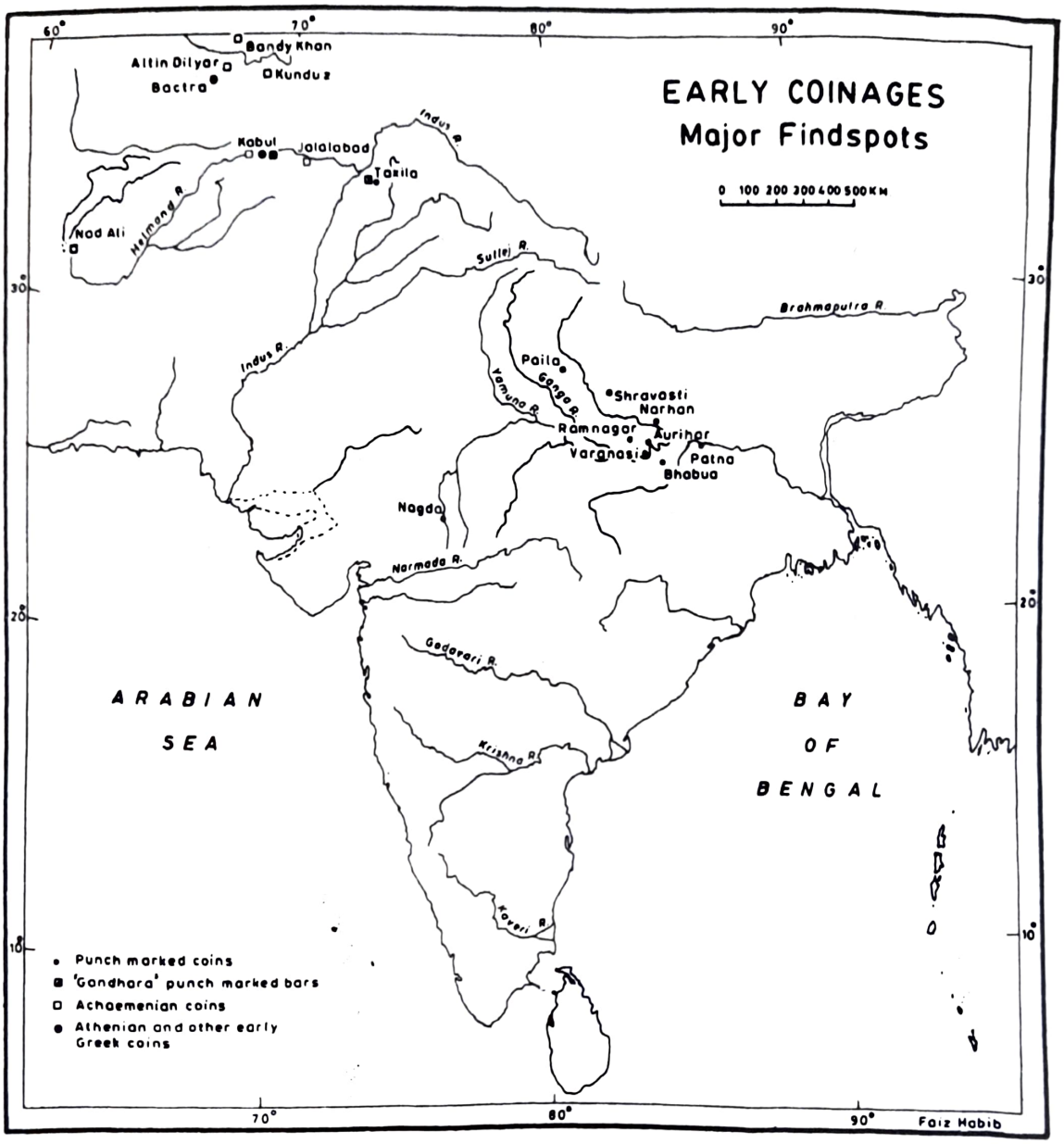
weight standards. On the 'obverse' (front), they bear various types of punched marks (see *Figure 1.5*). This kind of coinage is practically unique to India, and must thus be of indigenous origin. Metallic money had come into existence earlier in the eastern Mediterranean and West Asia, apparently from the need to have authenticated pieces of precious metal so that these could more easily serve as medium of exchange. Such authentication could have the greatest credit if this was provided by the state: thus coins began to be turned out of state mints, each bearing the symbols (and even the bust) of the ruler, along with inscriptions (termed 'legends') usually naming the ruler. Since the Indian punch-marked coins do not have any writing on them, it can only be presumed (without there being any absolute proof of it) that these were minted by states, and that the differences in the different symbols punched on them represent the different states or dynasties, if not also individual rulers, under whom the coins were issued.

More than 170 hoards of punch-marked coins have been brought to light from the entire Indian subcontinent. Bihar and Uttar Pradesh account for more than 70 of these hoards. But, barring perhaps Jammu and Kashmir and the region of the Brahmaputra valley, there is hardly any region from which these coins have not been recovered. The spread of these coins even includes the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan, and stretches into Afghanistan. Nearly 1,300 varieties of these coins have been identified so far. Though some hoards have yielded huge quantities of coins (Mir Zakah in Afghanistan: over 13,000, and Amaravati and Nandagaon in Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, respectively: nearly 8,000 coins each), it is yet not possible to form even a rough estimate of the total number of recovered pieces of this earliest series of coins. This is partly because of the high value of silver, the metal in which these coins were mainly minted, so that people have often tended to melt the coins down soon after their recovery. In 1937–38, a big hoard of at least 10,000 coins was discovered in village Deorapatti in Azamgarh district of Uttar Pradesh, but none has survived because all were melted down. Similarly, in 1968 a big earthen jar full of such coins was found at Asuragarh in Kalahandi district of Orissa. It is reported that the coins weighed several maunds (one maund = 37.32 kg), but all went to the melting pot. However, only a limited number of these hoards have yielded coins that can be definitely classed as pre-Mauryan (see *Map 1.2*).

The origin of the punch-marked coins has been a subject of keen debate among numismatists, and has been placed between *c.* 650 and 400 BC.

There has recently been a suggestion (by J. Cribb) to bring down the date of the first appearance of punch-marked coins by disregarding finds in the strata of the early phases of NBPW and placing their first occurrences within the 'middle' NBPW phase, whose beginning on the basis of clusters of 14C dates is put at around 400 BC (see *Note 2.1*). But there are major objections to so late a date being fixed for the beginning of punch-marked coinage. Cribb's argument is based on the contents of the Chaman Huzuri hoard (Kabul), which, as T.R. Hardaker has shown, can be interpreted quite differently, especially if we do not assume that the 'Gandhara bent bars', found

Map 1.2 Early Coinages: Major Findspots



in that hoard and at Taxila, were necessarily the progenitors of (and not mere hybrids with) the Indian punch-marked coins. If these punch-marked bar coins of Achaemenid weights are indeed hybrids, then this might take the beginnings of the punch-marked coins to a very early period since the bent bars probably began to be minted when Darius (522–486 BC) made Gandhara a province of the Achaemenian empire. Furthermore, the Bhir Mound hoard (Taxila) of *c.* 320 BC contains coins of what P.L. Gupta and T.R. Hardaker, in their classical analysis of types of punch-marked coins, call 'Series Va', issued by Magadha. For the period between *c.* 320 and *c.* 150 BC, when, after a great expansion under the Mauryas, the coinage ceased, Gupta and Hardaker distinguish just 120 types, while from the period before 320 BC as many as 476 types have been identified. It is surely impossible to compress all of these 476 types within

400–320 BC, a period of just 80 years; and a date before at least 500 BC would therefore seem to be more likely for the earliest mintings of punch-marked coins. Unfortunately, since we no longer know the code (of symbols) employed by the makers of punch-marked coins, and stratigraphic contexts are lacking for the majority of the coins recovered, it is still not possible to decide with certainty a particular coin's specific date, or to identify its issuer.

The Pali texts are familiar with 'sixteen great states' (*soḷasa mahājanapada*) and their emergence might be related to the appearance of the punch-marked coins in the area where those states were situated, i.e. India north of the Vindhyas. Some recent numismatists, building on the argument of the association of *janapada* with punch-marked coins, have even identified several pre-Mauryan/Ashokan punch-marked coins, and enumerated on their basis some additional '*janapadas*' such as Andhra (*c.* 500–350 BC), Ashmaka (*c.* 500–350 BC), Kaliṅga (*c.* 500–260 BC), Kuntala (*c.* 600–450 BC), Malla (*c.* 550–320 BC), Vaṅga (*c.* 550–500 BC), Shākya (*c.* 600–500 BC) and Surāṣhṭra (*c.* 450–300 BC). Some of these '*janapadas*' are included among the early sixteen *mahājanapadas*, while others are found in the expanded later list of 25½ states in the Jaina texts. Their dates as independent states remain fairly uncertain, and the assignment of certain sets of punch-marked coins to particular *janapadas* is, in most cases, highly speculative. So far as we can judge, the early punch-marked coins were first used in the Gangetic basin (*Map 1.2*), broadly coinciding in time and area with the NBP Ware in its early phase (*Map 2.1*).

Once money came into use, it brought in the elements of private profit and accumulation at the expense of the gift system characteristic of kinship ties. It also made possible centralized fiscal collection. Therefore, the role of punch-marked coins, called *kārṣhāpaṇa* or *kahāpaṇa* in literature, in facilitating the formation of state power structures cannot be underestimated. The word *kārṣhāpaṇa* is interesting, since *karṣha* (to cultivate) suggests that the metallic money originated out of the sale of agricultural produce, or was primarily the medium in which land tax was paid.

Note 1.2

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Ranabir Chakravarti, ed., *Trade in Early India*, Delhi, 2001 (chapters 1, 6 and 7), and Dilip K. Chakrabarti, *The Archaeology of the Deccan Routes: The Ancient Routes from the Ganga Plain to the Deccan*, New Delhi, 2004, are of help in dealing with issues of trade and trade routes.

2
Settlements, Towns and the Social Order

2.1 Rural Settlements in Literary Texts

Pali texts abound in references to villages, towns and cities where the Buddha or his associates and disciples stopped for a while and interacted with people. At some of these centres the Buddha also delivered sermons. One of the most frequently used terms for settlements is *gāma*, conventionally rendered 'village'. However, it had varied meanings such as ward, hamlet or even temporary settlement. The *Vinaya Piṭaka* defines *gāma* as consisting of one, three or four *kuṭis* (huts, usually made of sticks, grass and clay). In other words, a *gāma* could be no more than a small cluster of huts, not reaching even the status of a hamlet of today. A caravan camping for more than four months is also called a *gāma*. In the *Dīgha Nikāya* we find an allusion to *sakaṭa-sattho* (caravan of carts) handled by a thousand men. Such encampments could also be those of wandering bands of gypsy-like people.

Pāṇini distinguishes other kinds of rural settlements such as hamlets (*kheta*) and herdsmen's camps (*ghosha*).

Allusions to the *gāmas* of park attendants, reed-makers, salt-makers, elephant-keepers and horsemen show that some such settlements were marked by a degree of occupational specialization. The *Vinaya Piṭaka* tells us about *gāmas* that were surrounded by walls and about *gāmas* that lacked such trapping.

The Brāhmaṇa settlements were to be found mainly in the regions of monarchical rule, viz. Magadha and Kosala, perhaps because of early development of *brahmadeyya* (royal gift of land or estate to well-known Brāhmaṇas and others for services—probably ritual in nature—rendered to the king) which gave rise to Brāhmaṇa land-ownership in those regions. Some such *brahmadeyya* lands are

specifically called Brāhmaṇa *gāmas*. For example, kings Pasenadi and Bimbisāra gave away the villages Khānumata and Opasāda, respectively, to Bamhaṇas (Brāhmaṇas) Kūṭadanta and Chaṅki. In Ekanālā, the Bamhaṇa farmer Bhāradvāja had so much land that he needed as many as 500 ploughshares to plough it (*Saṃyutta Nikāya*)—doubtless, a statement containing much exaggeration. Possibly because of their riches, some of the Brāhmaṇa villages were fortified—a practice that received the Buddha's scorn at times.

References to *brahmadeyya* grants, along with terms such as *rājabhoggam* (in the sense of 'royal' land or that enjoyed by the king, and not in the sense of 'a [royal] grant to be enjoyed by the grantee'), need not be taken as prototypes of feudal establishments that started developing in India much after Mauryan times. There is nothing to show that the grantees mentioned in Pali texts performed administrative functions. Further, such grants were not made in perpetuity, nor did they carry any fiscal immunities, which were features of land grants made in the early centuries AD.

Nigama is another term that is equally relevant in the context of *gāmas*—the two are used almost synonymously, and occasionally even as a compound. The size of a *nigama* lay somewhere between that of a *gāma* and *nagara* (city) or *rājadhānī* (royal seat). It was, in all probability, a bigger unit than a *gāma* in so far as it was not simply a settlement of kin-groups or occupational and professional groups. (*Nigama* was also the designation given to a group of persons in such cities as Rājagaha and Sāvatthi, who were influential enough to have access to the king and the ability to persuade him to take certain decisions. Thus, it was at the behest of the *nigama* worthies of Rājagaha that Bimbisāra installed the courtesan Sīlāvatī in that town so that it might prosper through her fame.)

Different types of forests also find mention. The *Bhagavatī* refers to a dense forest (*aḍavi*) of eighteen *yojanas* near Rāyagiha (Rājagaha), and another text mentions a deep forest of *mālukā* trees near the same town. Rich and philanthropic persons were known to plant trees. In the *Nāyādhammakahāo* we find Maṇikara, a rich *shreṣṭhi* (merchant), undertaking such tree-planting around a big lake.

That the post-Vedic Sanskrit texts, specially the *Grihyasūtras*, are rooted in a predominantly rural ethos is demonstrated in their

numerous references to ceremonies relating to cattle and agriculture. They contain formulae to be pronounced over the cows when they go to their pasture grounds and which are designed to commit them to Pūshan, the divine protector of herds.

Other rites relating to cattle are the 'spit-ox' sacrifice (*shūlagāva*), akin in execution to its *shrauta* counterpart, viz. the offering of an ox in spring or autumn for propitiating Rudra—outside the village after sunset or even after midnight, and requiring the assistance of a Brāhmaṇa—and the *vrishotsarga* (the setting of a bull at liberty on the full moon day of Kārttika).

Of the numerous agricultural rites stipulated in the *Grihya-sūtras*, there are several of some importance. The ceremony of ploughing, accomplished after the plough has been yoked, requires the cooking of sacrificial food (*sthālīpāka*), and sacrificing to Indra, the Maruts, Parjanya (Rain), Ashani (Lightning), Bhaga (Good Fortune), Sītā (Furrow), etc. These deities receive similar offerings at the furrow sacrifice, the threshing-floor sacrifice, at the sowing and reaping of the crop, and at the putting of the crop into the barn. There were the offerings of the first fruits (*āgrayaṇa ishṭi*) that belonged also to the *shrauta* ritual, and were part of the domestic rituals undertaken immediately after the *āshvayujī*, a milk–rice oblation offered to Indra, Pashupati, Shiva, Rudra, or the Ashvins, on the full moon day of Āshvayuja.

2.2 Towns in Literary Texts

Urban centres of the period represented a new complexity and scale of human settlement, and they were also focal points of the contemporary political, military, economic, cultural and religious life.

Of the two terms *pura* and *nagara*, which are generally used for towns, *pura* is somewhat rare in the Pali texts. Some of these rare occurrences are to be located in the *Suttanipāta* and the *Vinaya Piṭaka*. Thus in the former we read of a *yakkha* of Āḷavi declaring that he would wander from *gāma* to *gāma* and from *pura* to *pura*. And the latter alludes to the plan of the Buddha to visit *Kāsināmpuram* ('*pura* of the Kāsis') immediately after his Enlightenment.

Nagara is used both in the sense of a fortified place and in its territorial aspect. In some cases, *nagara* was clearly a fortress rather than a city. It had ramparts and watch towers with strong foundations,

and arrangements for restricted and controlled entry through a gate guarded by the *dovārika* (gate-keeper). However, the transformation of Pāṭaligāma (Pāṭaliputra) into an *agga nagara* (premier city) is indicative of the closeness of the relationship between *nagara* as a town and *nagara* as a fortified enclosure. Originally perhaps a simple settlement or a small market, its strategic location (between Vesāli and Rājagaha, and on the confluence of the Ganga and the Son) led to the establishment of a *nagara* (fortified enclosure) near the original *gāma*; and, finally, a flourishing local economy saw it growing into a town, when it assumed the name of Pāṭaliputra. The same holds true of Kusinārā. While the Mallas lived in the fortified area of the *nagara*, Ānanda had to traverse a long distance before he could reach them at the time of the Buddha's death. One is left to infer that the area of the town was quite considerable.

Pali texts also speak of the six *mahānagaras* (great towns) of Champā, Sāvatthi, Banāras, Kosāmbi, Sāketa (Ayodhya) and Rājagaha. These were full of people and repositories of great wealth. These also attracted people of diverse interests and vocations. Some other towns, though not classed as *mahānagaras*, are still described as possessed of great resources and grandiose structures. Thus, Vesāli was renowned for its reputed 7,707 *pasādas*, 7,707 *kūṭāgāras*, 7,707 parks and 7,707 lotus ponds, and its courtesan, Ambapāli. Kapilavatthu was crowded with elephants, horses, chariots, carts and men. By contrast, lesser settlements such as Kusinārā, although themselves capitals of *janapadas* and notwithstanding their brick ramparts, received the diminutive appellation of *nāgaraka*.

The six *mahānagaras* above mentioned are found to be among the earliest urban centres discovered by archaeology; and this attests eloquently to the accuracy of our literary sources.

The city stands out in relation to other human settlements in the texts. Though the distinction between the city and the country is often highlighted, the city or the *nagara* is usually found at one end of a continuum, the continuum being expressed almost in the form of a formula: *gāma*, *nigama*, *nagara*. In the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, Ānanda, the Buddha's devoted disciple, pleads with the Buddha to take his *parinibbāna* (departure from this world) in a city

which would correspond to his exalted status, rather than in the modest town of Kusinārā:

> Let not the Exalted One die in this little wattle-and-daub town, in this town in the midst of the jungle, in this branch township. For, Lord, there are other great cities such as Champā, Rājagaha, Sāvatthi, Sāketa, Kosāmbi and Banaras. Let the Exalted One die in one of them. There are many wealthy nobles and Brahmanas and heads of houses, believers in the Tathāgata, who will pay due honour to the remains of the Tathāgata.

Nagaras were different not just in terms of their hierarchical position and the space occupied by them, but they also typified a certain specific ethos. One such ingredient of city life was its noise level. The Buddha so describes Kushāvati in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*:

> Both by day and by night, Ānanda, the royal city Kushāvatī resounded with ten cries, that is to say the noise of elephants and the noise of horses, and the noise of chariots; the sounds of drum, tabor, and of lute; the sound of singing and of the cymbal and gongs; and lastly, with the cry: 'Eat, drink and be merry.'

Several types of data have been quantified in order to underline the urban milieu of Pali texts. Out of nearly 4,500 allusions to settlements mentioned in these texts, over 95 per cent are to urban settlements. Of the 1,375 persons mentioned in the *Sutta* and *Vinaya Piṭakas*, and whose native background is identifiable, as many as 1,289 (nearly 94 per cent) were natives of towns and the rest, i.e. little over 6 per cent, belonged to rural areas. The six *mahānagaras*, viz. Banaras, Rājagaha, Vesāli, Champā, Kosāmbi and Sāketa, alone account for more than 40 per cent of these persons. Similarly, the same texts also throw light on the places associated with the sermons of the Master—of nearly 1,000 such allusions, the sermons at Sāvatthi alone account for nearly 60 per cent. Amongst other big towns, Rājagaha, Kapilavatthu, Vesāli and Kosāmbi occasioned nearly 25 per cent of the expositions. Data from relatively later texts such as the *Jātakas* are also enlightening. These narratives give details about the birth of the Bodhisatta in as many as 264 cases. Of these, 223 times (nearly 84.5 per cent) he was born in a town,

and only 41 times (15.5 per cent) at a rural place. Again, of the total of 229 births as Bodhisatta, where his professional background is referred to, in as many as 86 per cent of the cases he is either a king or prince, a rich merchant or high state official. Only 32 times (less than 14 per cent) does he take birth in a family of a low profession or adopt a low profession. The urban orientation of Buddhism is thus made amply clear.

The Brahmanical *Dharmasūtras*' contrary attitude towards the urban ethos has also been noted. The *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra*, for example, enjoins that the study of the Veda should be avoided in a market town, and the proper behaviour for a *snātaka*, i.e. a pious householder, who has completed his studies as a *brahmachārin*, is to avoid entering a town frequently. Baudhāyana, in his *Dharmasūtra*, declares that 'nobody living in the city, with his body covered with the dust of the city and his eyes and mouth filled with it, can attain salvation even if he leads an austere life'. The traits of an ideal dwelling place for a *snātaka* are thus spelt out in the *Gautama Dharmasūtra*: 'He should seek to dwell in a place where firewood, water, fodder, *kusha* grass, (material for making) garlands, and roads exist in abundance, which is chiefly inhabited by Aryans, which is rich in industrious (men), and which is governed by a righteous ruler.' Apparently, since *nagaras* encouraged questioning of established norms and behaviour, they could not be fitting dwelling places to authors of post-Vedic Sanskrit texts.

Commentators on Pāṇini's *Aṣhṭādhyāyī* differentiate between the words *grāma* and *nagara* found in it on the basis of the types of inhabitants they contained and other features. *Grāma* is a place which is primarily inhabited by Brāhmaṇas and agriculturists. *Ghosha* is mainly inhabited by people primarily rearing cattle and buffalo. *Nagara* is a settlement which is well-fortified by a defensive wall and moat, and inhabited by industrial guilds and mercantile communities. A settlement protected with parapet and moat, and inhabited by merchants, is *saṃvāha* (here is a reference to *puṭabhedana* or *pattana*, i.e. a city which is mainly a commercial centre).

Pāṇini also affirms that cities were not necessarily the result of random growth but could be products of deliberate design. He indicates his familiarity with the site marked for a planned moat, the land allotted for elevation of the city wall and the space demarcated for building the palace.

Besides such elements of town-planning, Pāṇini bears witness to two contradictory aspects of city life, i.e. its condemned and commendable features. The former was represented by thieves, gamblers, drunkards, prostitutes and go-betweens whose activities and plans are described in later texts such as the *Mrichchhakaṭika*. The commendable aspects of city life were represented by such *nāgarakas* as, according to later texts such as the *Kāmasūtra*, were possessed of worthy qualities, being well-bred, educated, expert in several languages, dexterous in several crafts, erudite, capable of fine conversation, proficient in providing entertainment, and of sharp and polished intellect.

As cities afforded greater security and closer proximity to political authority, well-to-do people, careerists, adventurers and hangers-on would flock to the cities, leading to a greater density of population in them as compared to the villages. A larger concentration of well-to-do people and families of the political and administrative elite and the royal court naturally created a demand for luxury and pleasure, and nurtured the attendant culture attuned to their satisfaction. The urban economy was more mercantile than the rural. But this difference ought not to be stressed too far since, in urban areas, there still lived a sizeable section of people who drew their sustenance from agriculture. In Pali texts we find *seṭṭhis* and *gahapatis* holding land in villages, and we encounter them going to the villages to collect revenue drawn from them.

2.3 Cities: The Archaeological Perspective

Surveys of proto-historic and early historic sites in the districts of Kanpur and Allahabad (both in Uttar Pradesh) by M. Lal and G. Erdosy yield interesting data about the increase in the areas under habitation (towns as well as villages) during the period *c.* 600–350 BC. Their data may be tabulated as follows:

Period	*Total Settlement Area*	
	Kanpur district	*Allahabad district*
c. 1000–600 BC	BRW to PGW: 17.25 to 53.58 hectares	Period I: 35.8 hectares
c. 600–350 BC	NBPW: 140.05 hectares	Period II: 100.5 hectares

If the population increased in the same proportion as the habitational areas of the settlements explored, the population in Kanpur district must have risen by at least 161 per cent and the population in Allahabad district by 180 per cent. Such an increase in population suggests considerable expansion of agriculture, and possibly also of crafts, in our period, compared to the preceding late Vedic phase.

Of the cities, Pāṭaliputra, later to be the capital of Magadha, grew into the largest one, covering some 1,300 hectares. F.R. Allchin offers two further estimates for Pāṭaliputra at its greatest extent (in Mauryan times): of either 2,200 hectares for the larger enclosed area, or 340 hectares for the area enclosed by the city moat. On the other hand, Kaushāmbi has been estimated by Erdosy as having covered an area of only 10 hectares between *c.* 1000 to 600 BC. A settlement of an intermediate size was that at Anuradhapura (Sri Lanka) (*c.* 600 to 450 BC) which covered some 18 hectares, while pre-400 BC levels at the Bala Hisar at Charsadda as well as at Taxila covered some 13 hectares each. A number of early historic towns were also small. Bhita, Pushkalāvatī, Eran and Ayodhya covered roughly 5.7, 10.1, 4.0 and 8.1 hectares, respectively. It is possible to use these individual areas for estimating approximate populations. If one accepts the average of 400 persons per hectare for densely settled sites (see *Mauryan India*, Chapter 3.1, pp. 126–27), we can give the following estimates of the maximum populations of some of the towns, 600–400 BC:

Kaushāmbi: 4,000
Taxila: 5,200
Ayodhya: 3,240
Bhukari (Ambala district): 4,000
Bala Hisar (Kabul): 5,200
Bhita: 2,280
Eran: 1,600
Anuradhapura: 7,200
Pushkalāvatī: 4,040
Atranjikhera: 25,600

In modern censuses the figure of 5,000 was often treated as an indicator of the urban nature of a settlement, since with such a size only a small proportion of the total population could have engaged in agriculture. We can see that, given our archaeological evidence, most of the urban settlements would not have passed the modern census test, and yet, by their economic nature, they were towns.

Broadly following the criteria worked out by Allchin, and keeping in view the limitations of published reports (Herbert Hartel's

Excavations at Sonkh, published in 1993, is an exception), often marked by unscientific documentation of artifacts, a few regular features of urban sites of the period may be distinguished.

Although direct archaeological evidence of settlement hierarchies is not yet sufficiently clear, fortified sites of considerable size from our period are found throughout northern India. In addition to Atranjikhera, at least four are stated to have been fortified by *c.* 550 BC: Rājagaha or Rajgir (see *Figure 2.1*), Champā, Ujjain and Rajghat (ancient Varanasi). It can hardly be a coincidence that they are capital cities of some of the key principalities known from literature: Magadha, Aṅga, Avanti and Kāshī, respectively. Taxila in the northwest may be added to this list, although its 'Achaemenid' strata are only exposed in a limited area. Sāvatthi or Shrāvastī (capital of Kosala *janapada*) was the last of the six great cities of the Buddha's time to emerge, and it was certainly fortified by the end of the 'early NBPW' period (or *c.* 400 BC). To this list may also be added the towns that had been established by *c.* 300 BC, viz. Besnagar, Mathura, Tripuri, Vaishali, not to mention the imperial capital of Pāṭaliputra or Patna (that superseded Rajgir), which, according to several excavators of the twentieth century and the accounts of the Greek envoy Megasthenes, was one of the largest cities of its time.

One cannot but be struck by the monumental nature of some of the early fortifications. The largest of these has been traced at Ujjain. The wall measures 75 m at the base, soars to a height of 14 m, and stretches for over 5 km; several others—those, for example, at Kaushāmbi, Rajgir, Ahichchhatra, Mathura and Atranjikhera—extended up to 40 m across the base, 15 m in height and 6 km in length. Some of these fortifications—such as those at Kaushāmbi—utilized existing undulations in the landscape, which could be found even in the Ganga valley. Their ramparts were occasionally riveted with baked bricks (at Kaushāmbi), or supported internally with wooden planks (at Ujjain and Kankarbagh in Patna). In later stages, these ramparts were surmounted by parapet walls of baked bricks or stone (at Rajgir). Their enormous size suggests that, in addition to defending settlements (from both attackers and floods), the ramparts may have served a symbolic function, delineating cities as islands of order in an otherwise chaotic landscape.

As for the lay-out of cities, we have only the testimony of

Marshall's excavations at Bhita (near Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh, excavated in the early twentieth century). Although his finds date primarily from the Maurya and post-Maurya periods, the durability of the city plan over centuries, coupled with fragmentary evidence from the 'mid-NBPW' levels at Kaushāmbi, suggests a greater antiquity for the lay-out of individual houses and of the settlement itself. At Bhita, streets leading to the major gateways were flanked by shops, though to what extent Marshall was guided by his observations of modern settlements here is not clear. Yet the lay-out of rooms along his 'main street' does lend support to his interpretations. The houses behind the shops, lined up in orderly fashion with lanes separating them, were well served by wells, drains and paved courtyards, and succeeded one another with little change in plan. By contrast, the one trench placed near the centre of the settlement showed a poorly constructed wall; this area may have been occupied by the poorer inhabitants, and showed lack of planning and of civic facilities such as well-maintained streets, wells and drains. Such differences in living conditions would clearly be expected from a stratified society, although they remain to be corroborated by evidence

FIGURE 2.1 Rajgir: inner face of Town Wall, east of the Banganga Defile
(Courtesy: Archaeological Survey of India)

from other sites or even by a detailed inventory of artifacts from individual living quarters.

At Sonkh (near Mathura, Uttar Pradesh), level 36 is called the 'transitional phase' which has been placed between the PGW (Painted Grey Ware) and 'early Maurya' levels. There is evidence of single-roomed circular and oval structures of wattle-and-daub, each served by a hearth. There are many post-holes and a gully (up to 10 cm wide) with depth varying between 5 and 12 cm. The gully has been taken as a 'depression marking the footing of a vanished hut whose superstructure was of a perishable material'. Traces of soot and remains of mud burnt black in the vicinity of a small depression at a distance of about 1.25 m from the outer edge of the 'house' suggest that here there was a fireplace. There was perhaps some space for a 'storage jar' as well. Amongst the associated finds, one can mention an anthropomorphic bone figure; beads of various materials, except lapis-lazuli; faience; blue, black and yellow glass; a gold foil; and a variety of ceramics. At Bhagwanpura (district Kurukshetra, Haryana), however, at least one rectangular structure centred on an open courtyard was found already in the PGW period.

Information about craft activities is somewhat scanty. Massive quantities of iron slag have been reported from Ujjain, and Sambhar and Rairh (both in Rajasthan). These coupled with the presence of hundreds of silver punch-marked coins in hoards found at Rairh show that production was possibly meant for a wide market. Blacksmiths' furnaces, indicative of a workshop, were found in the midst of a residential area at Atranjikhera (district Etah, Uttar Pradesh). Mathura, Rajghat (district Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh), Ujjain and Champā (district Keonjhar, Bihar) have yielded coppersmiths' furnaces along with moulds, workshops for bone arrow-heads and manufacture of beads, and a unique set of jeweller's moulds, respectively. At Atranjikhera and Sonkh, excavation reports have provided contextual information on the location of workshops within the settlements. Apart from possible granaries discovered at Atranjikhera and Mathura, there is yet no evidence for extensive storage facilities. The lists of objects recovered from individual sites, however, show a great expansion in craft products from the 'early NBPW' period onwards (see also *Note 2.1*).

The locations of several key cities at economically strategic

sites (for example, Kaushāmbī, which, despite its poor soil, enjoyed proximity to sources of iron ore and semi-precious stones in the Vindhyas; and Rajgir, at a great distance from rivers but still in proximity to the largest sources of iron ore in India) suggest that the procurement, processing, and distribution and exchange of key raw materials was one of the major functions of early cities. These cities are located in a wide range of regions. One important common factor, however, is that they are regions with fertile soil and high agricultural potential. In many regions, arteries of trade networks also facilitated the emergence and growth of urban centres. We can consider broadly the following regions.

1. The northwestern borderlands, with the three great Iron Age cities of Kandahar, Charsadda and Taxila, widely dispersed across the region. The main trade route from north India to Central Asia and China divides at Taxila. One of the branches of the Silk Route leads through the formidable Karakoram ranges to Kashghar and China, approximately along the route followed by the modern Karakoram highway. To the northwest the route continues to further important crossroads in Afghanistan and Central Asia.

2. The central Ganga plain, with its numerous cities and smaller satellite settlements extending from the Ganga–Yamuna doab in the west to the frontiers of Bengal in the east. If the landscape is somewhat unvaried and monotonous, this was more than compensated by a bewildering diversity in its population's socio-cultural composition. Throughout the central Ganga plain the principal river and its tributaries have incised their beds, and also their flood plains, into the older alluvium. From the beginning of our period settlements have been regularly situated on the older alluvium. Land routes starting from various points in the middle Ganga region extended into central India and the south. (See also Chapter 1.7.)

3. The western coastal plain contained at least two major Iron Age cities: Baruch (Bharukachchha) and Sopara (near Mumbai). Bharukachchha's connections with the interior are likely to have been along the same routes as those in use today. One route ran northwards through north Gujarat and Rajasthan, along the margin of the Thar desert and through the Ajmer gap, and then due east towards settlements along the Yamuna. The other main land route from

Bharukachchha led to the Deccan, and probably ran up the Tapi valley, which is relatively open.

4. The Iron Age cities of central and peninsular India occupy some of the fertile regions of the interior. Parts of the region have long been renowned for draught cattle and its sources of gold that have been exploited in Karnataka from chalcolithic times.

Early Pali texts mention three *janapadas* in central India and the Deccan: Avanti, whose capital was Ujjeni or Ujjayinī (Ujjain), on the route from the central Ganga valley to Kalyan and the west coast; Chedi, around Jabalpur, whose capital may have been Tripurī, on the more easterly route to the south; and Ashmaka in the northern Deccan, about which little is known. The cities of central India appear to share certain distinctive features: they are situated on major roads which linked the Ganga valley with the southern peninsula and the coasts; and they are found in fertile agricultural areas surrounded by hilly country and forests. Where descriptions of the fortifications are available, they appear in several instances to have been surrounded by massive moats and ramparts.

Tripurī (near Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh) and Airikina (modern Eran, district Sagar, Madhya Pradesh) were apparently included in the Chedi *janapada*. Excavations at Tripurī in the Narmada valley suggest that the settlement goes back to the second millennium BC, but it is still not clear at what date it assumed its role as a city. Eran has been excavated more extensively, but little has as yet been published. Its early occupation goes back to the first half of the second millennium BC, and the settlement seems to have undergone unbroken development thereafter. Probably it also produced its own coins. Two substantial early cities of Ujjayinī (Ujjain) and Vidisha (near Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh) belonged to the Avanti *janapada*.

Taking an overall view of the Deccan region, it seems that many settlements enjoyed a long and stable existence in pre-Mauryan times, and in consequence of their size and prestige, some of these, such as Suvaṁṇagiri (Maski?) and Isila (Brahmagiri) in Karnataka, were chosen as administrative centres by the Mauryas. This early development corresponds to widespread iron-working which dates back to the period between *c.* 750 and 500 BC (see Chapter 1.2 above).

5. The peninsular coastal strips, both eastern and western,

offer quite a different picture to that of the interior of the Deccan plateau. Maritime trade offered a long-standing stimulus to ports, which was augmented by the domestication and cultivation of rice with a resultant increase in population. Local trade, originating in the Ganga valley and northwest India, and passing through major ports on its way to other coastal harbours farther south, may have involved links with settlements on these coasts. Some of these ports would have become cities in their own right. An influencing factor, specially noticeable in the settlements along these coasts, was the greatly increased economic stimulus provided, probably from the time of Alexander onwards, by trade contacts with the Mediterranean.

6. In Sri Lanka we have sites such as Anuradhapura, Tissa Maharama and Mantai, again situated within regions of considerable agricultural potential, enhanced from an early stage by irrigation. As would be noted (*Note 4.1*), Anuradhapura has yielded the earliest evidence of the use of the Brāhmī script (*c.* fifth century BC). Script is an integral element of Gordon Childe's ten-fold criteria of urbanism.

2.4 Social Groups

The appearance of towns and the state (see Chapter 3) is interlinked with the emergence of a complex class society. Anthropologists believe that the earliest societies were basically kin-based and egalitarian, and hence, 'simple societies'. Leaders of 'bands' or chiefs headed each such society. The complex society, on the other hand, was marked by stratification, and its members were differentiated from one another on the basis of birth, status and, above all, resources. This kind of social stratification is the distinguishing mark of the society of our period. For its other feature, the state, see our Chapter 3.

Narendra Wagle has undertaken a very exhaustive treatment of the social fabric in his *Society at the Time of the Buddha* (1966). Based exclusively on the early texts of the Pali canon, it seeks sustenance from several useful insights drawn from anthropological studies of kin-based groups. He has been able to identify several social groups such as Brāhmaṇas, *gahapatis*, kings and princes, *gāmaṇīs*, monks, *upāsakas*, *paribbājakas*, *niganṭhas* (Jainas) and what he calls 'extended kin-groups'. Interrelationships amongst these groups can be sketched from multiple standpoints, viz. social, religious, political and economic.

'Gahapati' and 'Seṭṭhi'

Extensive trade and urbanization, to which attention has already been drawn, would have been impossible without a strong rural base and a sufficient agrarian surplus. Whenever the three principal sources of occupations, viz. agriculture, trade and cattle-keeping, are mentioned in our texts, agriculture is always given precedence over the others. Cattle formed part of the agriculturist's household property, to be used as draught animals, and for the production of meat, dairy produce and hides and skins. The precedence enjoyed by agriculture over the other occupations explains the nature and dominance of the class of *gahapatis* and *seṭṭhis*.

Unlike the late Vedic *grihapati*, the lord of the house or *pater familias* (the seniormost male member of the house), the *gahapati* of the Pali canon or *gāhāvai* of the Jaina *āgamas* represented a new propertied class as a member of which he commanded wealth, gathered from agriculture and from trade in agricultural produce and other commodities.

Gahapatis as a group did not belong exclusively either to the Buddhist or the Brahmanic order. There were some Brāhmaṇas amongst them, certainly. A *gahapati*, apparently inclined towards the Buddha, did not find any incongruity in welcoming a Brāhmaṇa to stay in his home, and even enjoining him to go and listen to the Buddha. Both the Buddha and the Brāhmaṇa, and, for that matter, even *paribbājakas* (religious mendicants), would command the *gahapati's* respect, but none his exclusive attention. The *gahapatis* were also counted amongst 'the seven jewels' of the king.

It is significant that although there is an occasional reference to a Brāhmaṇa *gahapati,* as one who had received a donation of land, there is never a reference to a Khattiya (Kshatriya) *gahapati*. Possibly the application of the term Khattiya (Pali texts generally use this term for the ruling families of non-monarchies, such as those of the Sākyas, Mallas, Lichchhavis, etc.) was limited to those who traditionally held political power, particularly in a non-monarchical system, and who belonged to an extended kin-group. His inherent political status was possibly held to be superior to that of the *gahapati*. Where commercial activity was nascent, political status in itself had value. There is rarely any marked tension between the Khattiya and the *gahapati*, even

though the more wealthy *gahapatis*, being the chief donors of religious sects, are often centres of attention. The tension is more frequent between the Brāhmaṇa and the Khattiya.

A number of *gahapatis* known for their affluence are mentioned by name in Pali texts and Jaina *āgamas*. The description of Meṇḍaka *gahapati* emphasizes his role as a tax-giver. His entire family, comprising wife, son, daughter-in-law and slave, acts as a unit. Meṇḍaka pays the king's army's wages in kind and cash, and orders 1,250 cowherds (*gopālika*) to give fresh milk to the Buddha and his *saṃgha*. Even psychic powers are attributed to Meṇḍaka. Anāthapiṇḍaka's purchase of the Jeta grove (*Jetavana*) has already been mentioned. When Anāthapiṇḍaka intended to give a huge meal to the Buddha, the king as well as the urban council of Rājagaha joined him. *Gahapati* Dasma of Aṭṭhakanagara gave Ānanda many robes and a building for the monastery, which was worth 500 coins. As a financier, the *gahapati* lent money to promising shopkeepers. Ghosaka or Ghosita of Kosāmbi was also famous for the lavish support he gave to the Buddha, and he built an *ārāma* (a monastery whose remains were unearthed at Kaushāmbī) for him and his followers. In situations of dispute between *gahapatis* and monks, the Buddha invariably sided with the former, as was the case with *gahapati* Chitta and the monk Suddhamma.

In sum, the *seṭṭhi–gahapatis* were the leading middle-class *gahapatis* as distinct from both the Brāhmaṇas, holding their position by birth, and the members of the ruling aristocracy. Wagle has even characterized the *gahapatis* as constituting a 'more or less secular population', forming the prize in the struggle between the Buddhists and the Brāhmaṇas.

The emergence of *gahapati* from simple Vedic householder to a wealthy head of the household may represent the growing disparity of wealth within society. Commenting on the condition of the poor and the realities of their situation, the Buddha said: 'A certain man has to go to prison for theft of half a *kahāpaṇa*, a *kahāpaṇa*, a hundred *kahāpaṇas*. Another person does not have to go to prison for stealing the same amount.' 'This was so', the Buddha explains, 'because the former is a poor fellow of small means. The man who does not go to prison is a rich man of great means.'

The Pali texts do not use the three apparently similar terms, *seṭṭhi*, *gahapati* and *seṭṭhi–gahapati*, synonymously. While *shreshṭhin* in the sense of a man of honour, a man of high rank, a leader, is mentioned in the *Aitareya* and *Shāṅkhāyana Brāhmaṇas*, the connotations of the *seṭṭhi* given in Pali are quite different. The situation is perhaps analogous to the one noted above in the notions of *grihapati* of Sanskrit texts and of *gahapati* in the Pali canonical texts. The Pali dictionary gives two distinct groups of meanings to *seṭṭhi*: 'a wealthy merchant', 'a foreman of a guild', on the one hand, and 'a treasurer, a banker', on the other, the intermediary term being simply 'the city man'. The second group of meanings of Pali '*seṭṭhi*' is not included among the meanings given for *shreshṭhin* in Sanskrit dictionaries.

While the *seṭṭhi* was a very wealthy merchant, the *gahapati* seems to have been noted for his sizeable holdings. Occasionally the two (*seṭṭhi–gahapati*) also figure as a compound. The Pali term *seṭṭhi* appears in a period of the founding of new cities, and of the origins and development of commerce, and its new significance is inseparably bound up with these new circumstances. The *seṭṭhi*, living by agriculture, usually lived in the province (*pachchante*). Several references in the *Jātakas* make it clear that that the *seṭṭhi* originally occupied himself with agriculture—we hear of the '*seṭṭhi* whose wealth is in cattle'. The connection with agriculture can be seen from the fact that a *seṭṭhi* is said to be harnessing a bullock to carts loaded with sand, gravel and stones to test its strength and usefulness for hard labour in the fields. The *seṭṭhi* paid taxes from his fields. In one *Jātaka* story there is mention of 'a country *seṭṭhi*' (*janapadaseṭṭhi*).

The *seṭṭhi–gahapati* occasionally figures in the Pali texts as a wealthy person who invests some money with a shopkeeper or a tailor (*tuṇṇavāya*) or a weaver (*tantuvāya*). One may reasonably infer that some prosperous *gahapatis* invested part of their wealth, derived mainly from their landed estates, in small business enterprises. Judged in this light, the *seṭṭhis*' trading activities appear to have been linked with the agrarian sector.

Everything testifies to the fact that the town *seṭṭhis* acquired considerable wealth much more quickly than those in the country. The *seṭṭhi* here employed business agents (*kammanti-kamānussā*). These were headed by a *mahākammantika*—the business manager, who was

the *seṭṭhi*'s proxy, too. *Dāsakammakāras*, 'slaves and servants', constituted the lowly group who worked for the *seṭṭhis*. As the town *seṭṭhis* grew in importance, their proximity to the king also increased. The services rendered to the king gave the 'position of *seṭṭhi*' (*seṭṭhitthānam*) the significance of an office, especially in royal capitals. Such a *seṭṭhi* is sometimes called *mahāseṭṭhi* (as for instance Anāthapiṇḍaka), who seems to have acquired the decisive word in all matters relating to other *seṭṭhis*.

The *seṭṭhi* was a man who had sufficient wealth and, therefore, one to whom recourse was taken by all who wished to make their living by trade and needed some initial capital, or had run into debt and sought a way out. The *seṭṭhi* lent such persons money for which he got in return 'promissory notes' or 'debt sheets' (*iṇa-paṇṇāni*). Here the *seṭṭhi* appears in the role of a usurer: we can now call him a moneylender and, perhaps, even 'banker'.

It is consistent with the development of such activities that the loan (*iṇa*) is viewed in the Pali canon as essential for launching and maintaining an enterprise (*kammante payojeyya*). But the borrower is advised that he must be able to repay the loan and also maintain his family. According to the *Vinaya*'s injunctions, a debtor's admission to the *saṃgha* was not to be permitted. Regular links between the new religious ideas and the mercantile community are suggested by the Buddhist narratives of itinerant monks and merchants sharing the same shelter during the prolonged rainy season (*vassāvāsa*).

The *seṭṭhi* seems to have been distinguished from the *vāṇija*. *Vāṇijas* actually carried on trade themselves and not through agents, as the *seṭṭhis*, being bigger men, did. A group of *seṭṭhis* apparently separated from the agricultural population and, besides farming, began to engage more fully in commerce. As time passed, two groups of *seṭṭhis* gradually developed: one in the country and the other in the town.

The content of the term *seṭṭhi* thus underwent considerable changes with the steady development of commercial relations. And yet, there is no reference to any connection of the *seṭṭhi* with the guilds in any part of the Pali canon, and the translation of *seṭṭhi* as 'the foreman, or the head of a guild' does not seem to be justified.

The relevant descriptions in the Jaina āgamic texts are no different from the picture of *gahapatis* and *seṭṭhis* delineated above on the

basis of early Buddhist texts. The *Uvāsagadasāo* mentions ten such rich and affluent *gāhāvais* or *gāthāpatis* (*gahapatis*) who employed about one-third of their wealth in business and crafts. The total wealth of each of these men is said to have varied between 3 and 24 crore *hiraṇya* (gold coins?), and investments in such ventures varied between 1 and 8 crore *hiraṇya*. (The fantastic figures will have to be disregarded.)

Gāhāvais are also called *ibhya*, *shreṣṭhi* and *kuṭumbika* in some Jaina texts along with allusions to their association with the royal establishment. Pārāsara was adept in agricultural work and was therefore called *kisipārāsara*. He was also an owner of 600 *halas* (ploughs). The son of Gosaṅkhi *kuṭumbi* carried his carts full of pitchers containing ghee to Champā for sale. Nanda was a resourceful *shreṣṭhi* of Rājagaha, who spent an enormous sum of money to build a water pond. Gahapati Ānanda of Vāṇiyagama engaged in moneylending, exacting bonds (*kuḍalehas*) from the borrowers. Defaulters' houses were identified with dirty flags hoisted over them, signifying social ostracism.

That trade was well established in the material life of north India is also indicated by the famous grammatical treatise, the *Aṣhṭādhyāyī* of Pāṇini. The grammarian, however, is silent on *seṭṭhis*, and uses the generic term *vaṇija* to denote a merchant. Nevertheless, Pāṇini informs us of different types of *vāṇij*, for example, *go-vaṇija* (cattle dealer), *ashva-vaṇija* (horse trader), *Gāndhārī vaṇija* and *Mādra vaṇija*. Pāṇini's classification of the *vaṇija* is thus made either on the basis of the commodities they dealt in or the areas they traded in, or with both.

Kin-based Groups and Social Relationships

Pali texts mention several terms of varied import that throw light on the dynamics of the complex society that was now evolving. Unlike Brahmanical Sanskrit texts such as the *sūtra* literature, it is not just that they refer to *varṇa* and *jāti* in their Pali forms, viz. *vaṇṇa* and *jāti* respectively. While these terms do occur, there are other terms which are somewhat specific to Pali texts. These include *ghara*, *kula*, *ñāti*, *ñātaka*, *ñatisālohita*. Cumulatively, they present varied notions of households and kin-based groups. The kinship system may be understood as a working mechanism linking human beings together in a

more or less orderly arrangement of kinship interactions (say, parents and children, husband and wife, relations amongst siblings, etc.). Such relationships were not without their economic contexts.

A wife addresses her dying husband thus: 'Maybe you think: "When I am gone, the mother of Nakula [the wife] may not be able to support the children nor to keep the household together." But by skill at spinning cotton and carding matted wool, she can support the children and run the household (*ghara*).' This description using the term *ghara* is surely indicative of the division of labour within the family, the women specializing in carding and spinning.

The word *kula* has several connotations. Family is certainly one of them. This is apparent in the use of such terms as *kulaputta* (junior male member), and *kulapati* and *kulajeṭṭha* (the head). As an example of acquisition of great wealth by a family, we notice that a village (*gāma*), a residence (*nivesana*), a stable (*uddhosita*), a verandah (*aṭṭo*), a watch tower (*māḷo*), a cottage (*hammiya*), a boat (*nāva*), agricultural land (*khetta*) and a threshing floor (*dhāñña karaṇiya*) could all belong to one family (*eka kulassa*).

Kuṭumba (family) was related to entitlements to *dāyājja* (inheritance). While the nuclear family consisted of immediate blood relations such as a man, his wife and unmarried children, the extended family consisted of a man and his parents, son, wife, son's wife, brothers, sisters and other dependent relatives. The household group was even larger, and included slaves and household servants. It could also include on occasion friends and acquaintances, agricultural workers and their superintendents, who obviously might not be related through kinship ties.

One may also notice some important similarities between *kula* and *jāti*. Elements of social stratification become manifest when (a) both tend to get resolved into Khattiya, Bamhaṇa, Vessa [Vaishya] and Sudda [Shūdra] groups; and (b) both invoke connotations denoting status: high *kula* (*uchchakula*, such as Khattiya, Bamhaṇa and *gahapati*) or low *kula* (*nīcha kula*, such as Chaṇḍāla, Nesāda, *rathakāra*, *pukkusaka*), and *hīna* (low) *jāti* (Chaṇḍāla, Veṇa, Nesāda, *rathakāra*, etc.) and *ukkaṭṭa* (excellent) *jāti* (Khattiya and Bamhaṇa) or rich *kula* (*aḍḍhakula*) or great *kula* (*mahākula*).

Such social stratification was commented upon by the Buddha in response to Sundarika's enquiry about his origin. The Buddha is said to have retorted: 'Do not ask of the origin (*jāti*), ask of the behaviour. Just as fire can be born out of any wood, so can a saint be born in a *kula* of low status' (*Saṃyutta Nikāya*). The Buddha also denied that any reference can be made to the theory of *jāti* (*jātivāda*) when supreme perfection in wisdom and righteousness are being considered. The Master said that reference to *jātivāda*, *gottavāda*, *mānavāda* (signifying prestige by birth) could be made only in marriage (*āvāha-vivāha*) or, say, in matters of social intercourse.

On two other terms of social significance, viz. *vaṇṇa* and *ñāti*, Pali texts provide a picture that is not easily available in other contemporary texts in Sanskrit. *Vaṇṇa* is a two-category system with the Bamhaṇa and Khattiya forming the upper category, and Vessa and Sudda forming the lower. The struggle for status was confined mainly to the Khattiya and Bamhaṇa groups—each aspiring for a ritually superior status. However, the real social groups were the ruling extended kin-groups. When king Pasenadi asked the Buddha if there could be, in future, any distinction amongst the four *vaṇṇas* (Khattiya, Bamhaṇa, Vessa, Sudda) with qualities of striving, the Buddha answered through the following simile:

> It is as if there may be among elephants, horses or oxen to be tamed, two elephants, two horses or two oxen that are well trained and well tamed and two each that are not tamed and trained. What do you think about this? Would these two elephants, horses and oxen that are to be tamed, when so tamed and trained, reach the tamed state? Would they attain a tamed rank?

It appears that the Buddha recognized four *vaṇṇas* and yet, through his simile, professed their eventual extinction. Also, when a man joined the *saṃgha*, he became a person without a *vaṇṇa* (*vevaṇṇiyanti*).

Ñāti (clan of kindred, a smaller group than *jāti*) or extended kin-group functioned as an effective caste. The apportioning of the remains of the body of the Buddha (*sarīra bhāga*) amongst the clans of the Lichchhavis of Vesāli, Koḷiyas of Rāmagāma, Mallas of Pāvā, Bullis of Allakappa and Moriyas of Pipphalivana was undertaken on the

ground that all of them, like the Buddha, were Khattiyas. *Ñāti* could make rules and impose punishment. Among the four kinds of losses that cause renunciation, the loss of *ñāti* is one.

Ñātisālohita is the only term in Pali texts that seems to be referring etymologically to blood ties. It denotes agnates. It also refers only to the paternal side; the term *ñātaka*, however, recognizes the bilineality of the kinship group. The words *ñāti* and *ñātaka* are found in the inscriptions of Ashoka who refrains from using the terms *vaṇṇa* and *jāti*.

The Ideal and the Deviant in Family and Inter-Group Relationships

In the vast corpus of Pali texts, the *Sīgālovāda* or *Sīgālaka Sutta* (*Extract 2.1*) is an important charter that seeks to delineate some basic human relationships, specially amongst the members of what Wagle has called 'extended family' and the household. This document constitutes an ideal, while, as often happens, human relations are in reality more complex.

On the relationship between parents and children the classic case in point would be Ajātasattu, who admitted before the Buddha that he killed his righteous father (Bimbisāra) for the throne. On the other hand, notwithstanding some poignant and even melodramatic accounts of parents' love and affection for sons, we find the Buddha advising the Brāhmaṇa Mahāsāla, who was driven out of his home by his sons, to shame them in public (*Saṃyutta Nikāya*). An *upāsaka* presented a store-room to a group of nuns in his lifetime, yet his son asked his more honest brother after the *upāsaka*'s death: 'Let us divide (*bhājāma*) the property, the store-room is ours.'

The Buddha's portrayal of an ideal daughter or wife is noted in the following words of consolation pronounced at the time of the birth of a daughter (instead of a son) to Pasenadi. 'A female child may prove an even better offspring than a male one. For she may grow up wise and virtuous. She will honour her mother-in-law (*sassudevā*) and be faithful to her husband (*patibbā*). The boy that she may bear may do great deeds' (*Mallikā Sutta*, *Saṃyutta Nikāya*). There are obvious patriarchal overtones here.

Again, on the relationship between husband and wife, the

Buddha describes the following seven types of wives to Sujātā, the unruly daughter-in-law of Anāthapiṇḍaka: (1) like an executioner (*vadhaka sama*): a bad wife having a connection with someone else and ready to murder her husband; (2) like a thief (*chori sama*): one who always tries to get money and ornaments from her husband, and is never ready to give him anything from it; (3) like a grandmother (*ayya sama*): one who is lazy, inactive, easily irritable and keeps her husband in hard control; (4) like a mother (*mātu sama*): a wife who is full of compassion for her husband; (5) like a sister (*bhaginī sama*): a wife who has great regard for her husband; (6) like a friend (*mita sama*): a wife who is faithful and friendly; and (7) like a servant (*dāsī sama*): one who is always afraid of her husband, standing in obedience. Types 1–3 are harsh and distrustful, and live in hell after death. The remaining types are virtuous and heaven is promised to them after their death. Sujātā prefers to opt for the last type (*Aggi Sutta, Aṅguttara Nikāya*). It is characteristic that there are no similarly idealized classifications of husbands!

Of the numerous social groups mentioned in Pali texts, the relationship between the Buddha, the members of his monastic order and several other types of ascetics (*paribbājakas* and *niganṭhas*), on the one hand, and the Bamhaṇas, *gahapatis*, the king and his establishment, on the other, had several shades. Identifiers such as *gottas* (in the context of Bamhaṇas, Khattiyas, and even of monks) and *mantas* (Vedic learning in the case of Bamhaṇas) do not alone convey the entire reality of inter-group relationships. Generally, the Bamhaṇas tried to maintain an attitude of equality with the Buddha, who in turn showed sensitivity towards the Bamhaṇas' social status. There were occasions, indeed, when the normal courtesies of extending greetings to him were not followed by the Bamhaṇas. In Pañchasāla, the Brāhmaṇa *gāmas*, householders, did not offer food to the Buddha even at festivals.

In the religious field, the Buddhist order claimed several distinguished Brāhmaṇas within its fold. Politically, too, the Buddha was less encumbered than the Brāhmaṇas. Unlike them, he was not servile to the king, though, despite their actual humility in the king's presence, in their own modes of address the Brāhmaṇas recognized no superior in any system of ranking, but at the most only equals.

The position of the *upāsakas* was different from that of the

gahapatis. Being actively concerned with religious affairs, the *upāsakas* were convinced of the Buddha's doctrine and became his lay devotees, having been usually converted after an argument with the Buddha or a well-known monk. Among them were Brāhmaṇas as well as others. However, Brāhmaṇa *upāsakas* had to resort to various subterfuges in openly acknowledging the Buddha as their superior, even when they were intellectually convinced of his superiority. But the Buddha became their professed superior if they became monks. Even within the *saṃgha*, a person retained his past group affiliation to some extent. The Brāhmaṇa monks retained their *gotta* affiliations. Addressing a monk by his *gotta* name, whenever it existed, was made a *Vinaya* rule.

Slavery

The Pali canon leaves us in no doubt that as differentiation in society grew, with richer *gahapatis* and *seṭṭhis* forming the upper rungs of society, there accumulated a large number of slaves at the bottom. Slaves (*dāsa*), themselves considered the property of their master (*ariya*), had no right to any possessions themselves. Anecdotes in the Pali texts show how a master could kill or cut off the nose and ears of his slave with no fear of penalty. Women slaves (*dāsīs*) were in a worse position still. A woman slave, made to sleep with her master, was beaten and had her nose and ears cut off by the master's enraged wife. The Buddha himself encountered a woman slave determined to commit suicide owing to the ill-treatment she received. No slave, unless manumitted, could be admitted to the Buddhist *saṃgha* by the Buddha's own prescriptions.

2.5 Gender Relations, Marriage

In societies that developed various forms of differentiation based on exploitation of labour, the woman's position tended to be proportionately depressed, to the extent that she could even begin to be viewed as an article of male property. The various forms of marriage in vogue offer us one indication of the degrees of subordination that women could be subjected to in increasingly class-differentiated societies. An enumeration in the *Vinaya Piṭaka* tells us of as many as ten forms of marriage: (1) *dhanakkhitā*: when a woman is bought with

money; (2) *chandavāsinī*: when a woman stays of her own accord with a man; (3) *bhogavāsin*: when she is kept for passion; (4) *paṭṭavāsinī*: when a man gives her clothes; (5) *odapattakānī*: when an ablution of water is performed; (6) *obhatachumbaṭā*: when she removes her headwear; (7) *dāsi-nāma*: when she is also a female slave; (8) *kammakāri*: when she is also a servant; (9) *muhuttikā*: when she is temporarily with a man; and (10) *dhajahaṭā*: when she is captured in a raid. In addition, there was *āvāha-vivāha*, with a ceremony elaborate enough to be mistaken for a royal feast that occurs among *gahapatis*.

The Vajjians and the Sākyas did not disapprove of marriage between brother and sister. Although the myth of Sākyas' origin from such a union arose out of an exaggerated claim to purity, the Buddha's injunctions to Vajjians not to overpower *kula kumārīs* and *kula itthis* would perhaps mean that marriages with classificatory sisters was not ruled out. It is, however, possible that the brother–sister union does not imply anything more than an expression of ethnic solidarity.

The ten forms of marriage listed in the *Vinaya Piṭaka* have many parallels in the eight forms of marriage mentioned in most of the Sanskrit *sūtra* texts. These are: (1) *brāhma*, where the bridegroom is invited by the father of the bride, the bride having no role in the choice of her husband; (2) *daiva*, the bride is given to the officiating priest, who performs a sacrifice for her father; (3) *prājāpatya*, the giving of the bride to the groom with the injunction that they should never cease to perform *dharma* together; (4) *ārsha*, in which the groom presents the bride's father, or any other person who has authority over her, with a bull or cow; (5) *rākshasa*, where the girl is forcibly carried away against her will; (6) *āsura*, a marriage by purchase, the price being paid to the girl's parents; (7) *gāndharva*, whether for gratification of carnal desire, a runaway marriage or a love marriage without the consent of the parents; and, finally, (8) *paishācha*, pure and simple seduction or sexual intercourse with a maiden while she is asleep or intoxicated. While in the *rākshasa* form the woman is taken away forcibly, in the *paishācha* she is a victim of deception and fraud.

These forms listed in the *sūtra* texts have been broadly classified as the approved ones (1–4) and the unapproved ones (5–8). However, in terms of details, the texts differ. Some do not even mention all the eight forms; for example, *Āpastamba* excludes *prājāpatya* and

paishācha. There is a strong *varṇa* factor in the provisions of these forms. By and large, the approved ones are for the upper two *varṇas*, whereas the last two are lawful for the two lower *varṇas*. There is some compatibility with the *Vinaya Piṭaka* list: 'wife bought with money' is similar to the *āsura* form; 'one who is kept for passion' may be equated with *gāndharva*; one who is 'captured in a raid' could be the same as *rākshasa*. *Odapattakānī*, when an ablution of water is performed, reminds one of the ceremony of libation of water in the *sūtras*, which is considered to be one of the most important ceremonies of the sacrament (*saṃskāra*) of marriage.

Pali texts are familiar with polygamous marriages, the term for a co-wife being *sapatnī*. The Brāhmaṇa Mahāgovinda had forty (!) wives, and Ugga *gahapati* had four. The Buddha says that it was much more difficult for a man with one wife, ugly and poor, to go forth (to join the order) than for a rich man with wives.

Marriages were not necessarily always final. When Ugga *gahapati* renounced worldly ties, he offered his four wives a choice: 'If there is any man whom you desire, I could give you to him.' The eldest one chose to take another man and was given to him. Jealousy amongst co-wives was not unknown. In a story of two co-wives, one fertile and the other barren, the latter secures the death of the unborn child of the former by administering a drug through a monk. There are also allusions to wives who quarrelled with their husbands or treated them contemptuously. An old Brāhmaṇa who marries a young girl is shown as henpecked: he promises to present her with a pet monkey (*makkaṭachchhāpako*) if she gave him a son (*Majjhima Nikāya*). Adulterous wives, like adulterous husbands, were not unknown, but the woman's punishment could be very severe: we find a Lichchhavi man consulting the Lichchhavi *gaṇa* in order to get their consent to kill his wife for committing adultery.

Forms of marriage offer us one index of the degree of the woman's servitude; but there are other indicators as well. When an Indian military chief, 'Keteus', was killed in a battle in Iran in 316 BC, in an internecine war among Alexander's successors, his younger widow mounted the funeral pyre with him, as a very early Greek report (Diodorus, *c.* 21 BC) tells us. There is no mention of '*sati*' in our own literary sources of the fourth century BC or earlier. But it is clear that

many practices must have prevailed in society which did not enter the prescriptions of the *dharma-sūtras*, or the narrations of the early Pali canon; and '*sati*' was apparently one of them. Keteus' widow in 316 BC might thus well have been following a long-established custom, which required this act of her. The practice has its admirers still, as shown by the numerous flourishing shrines raised to '*satis*'.

2.6 Occupational Divisions

The term used for 'occupation' in Pali texts is *sippa*. Extensive specialization is the hallmark of almost all occupations. There could thus be fine distinctions made between similar professions, as between the *ambapālaka* (keeper of a mango orchard) and the *jambupālaka* (keeper of an orchard of rose-apple trees).

Occupations were divided into high and low. Counting coins (*muḍḍā*), keeping accounts (*gaṇanā*) and writing (*lekhā*) are included among the former (on the existence of writing, see below), whereas the *chammakāra* (leather worker), *naḷakāra* (reed worker), *kumbhakāra* (potter), *pesakāra* (tailor), and *nahāpita* (barber) came under the latter. The term *sippa* thus denotes diverse professions, manufacturing crafts and services, and covered both manual and non-manual skills. Farming, cattle-rearing and trading are referred to as vocations (*kammaṃ*).

Service Occupations

The *rajaka* (washerman–dyer), *chittakāra* (painter), *nahāpita* and *kappaka kasāvaṭo* (barber), *pesakāra*, *tantavāya*, *āḷārika*, and *sūda* (cook) and *nāhāpaka* (bath attendant) mainly followed service occupations. Of these, the *nahāpita* or barber is perhaps the most frequently mentioned of all the service providers. He was used as a messenger by the Bamhaṇa Lohichcha; a barber is said to have received the gift of a village from the legendary king Makhadeva for being his personal attendant. The *nahāpita* and *rajaka* are represented as having their sons working for them. A *nāhāpaka* had an attendant (*antevasi*) under him.

Artisans

References to the following artisans occur in Pali texts: *naḷakāra* (reed worker), *kumbhakāra* (potter), *yānakara* (cart maker), *tuṇṇavāya* (tailor–weaver) *sūchikāra* (needle maker), *suvaṇṇakāra*

(goldsmith), *kammāra* (metalsmith), *palagaṇḍa* (carpenter), *dantakāra* (ivory worker), *mālākāra* (garland maker) and *kosiyakāra* (silk manufacturer). *Naḷakāras* are described as living in their own settlement (*naḷakāra gāma*), possibly because of their low status. The *kumbhakāra* was perhaps the most important of all artisans. His occupation is amongst those few whose ritual position is not very low. Ghaṭikāra, a *kumbhakāra*, was a faithful devotee of the Kassapa Buddha. Although he was poor and could offer only rice and curry, he was held in deep affection by the Buddha Kassapa, who addressed him as Bhagava, a term denoting *gotta*.

Of the cart maker we know very little except that he is shown repairing a wheel. Like *nahāpita* and *rajaka*, he was assisted by his son (*putta*) (son). This was also the case with the *palagaṇḍa* (carpenter) as well as the *dantakāra* (ivory worker), apparently because the crafts were expected to run in the families.

The *kammāra* (metalsmith) is equated with *suvaṇṇakāra* (gold worker). Chunda, a *kammāraputta*, 'metalsmith's son', was a man substantial enough to own a mango grove. It was at his place that the Buddha ate his last meal. Canonical texts mention several metals and minerals, viz. iron, copper, tin, lead, silver, gold, mica (*abhrapaṭala*), antimony (*añjana*), mercury (*sāsaga*), vermilion (*hiṅgulaya*), rock-salt (*loṇa*) and sulphur (*sogan-dhiya*).

The *Bhagavatī* tells us how fishermen went out to the rivers and ponds early in the morning with their fishing hooks and nets. They knew the art of making fishing nets by using different kinds of knots. Saurikadatta, a fisherman of resource, went out in the Yamuna with a large party and is said to have caught fish by twenty-two different methods.

Agriculture, forests, mines, etc., provided enough raw materials for conversion into finished products. Sugarcane was crushed and processed into *sharkarā* (sugar). Cotton, wool and silk fibres ('tasar' and 'eri', presumably) were used for production of different varieties of cloth. Wine was prepared by fermentation from different kinds of fruits and from other agricultural products. Timber was used for manufacturing furniture and building materials. Animal hides and skins served the leather industry. All these should have given rise to several types of occupations.

Professions

Within this group were physicians (*vejja*, *bhiṣhaka*) and surgeons (*sallakata*), and those whose professions involved 'writing (*lekhā*)', keeping accounts (*gaṇana*) and money-changing (*muḍḍā* or *rūpaṃ*). The physician's profession appears to have been valued the most. This may be seen from the frequent appreciative mention of the skill of Jīvaka, the son of a courtesan, Sīlāvatī. He and the monk Upāli (formerly a barber, who later became an expert in *Vinaya*) are two very important persons in the Pali texts. Apart from Jīvaka, Ākāsagotta *vejja*, a Brāhmaṇa, is the only other doctor mentioned by name in Pali texts. Unlike Jīvaka, he was hostile and even insulting to the Buddha.

Money-changing and account-keeping in general, and writing are identified positively as high *sippas* (occupations) in the texts. In a society where intellectual occupations are necessarily the preserve of a few, it is natural that such occupations enjoyed high status. Whatever may be the wisdom of Upāli's parents in their choice of monkhood for their son, there is little doubt that after monkhood (though hardly a profession), they considered writing, accountancy and dealing in money to be the best of professions. The reference to writing may, however, be anachronistic and is probably suggestive of a Mauryan-period redaction of our texts, since there is still no firm evidence that writing was known in eastern India in pre-Mauryan times (see *Note 4.1*).

Entertainers

The actor (*naṭa*), dancer (*naṭaka*), acrobat (*laṅghika*), magician (*sokajjāyika*), drummer (*kumbhathunika*), female fortune-teller (*ikkhaṇikā*), courtesan (*gaṇikā*) and common prostitute (*vesī*) were counted among the chief entertainers. Courtesans (*gaṇikā*) do not seem to have been despised. They could become nuns. Ambapāli, the renowned courtesan of Vesāli, had the privilege of inviting the Buddha and the 1,250 monks in his entourage for a meal. She also dedicated an *ārāma* for the *saṃgha*. When invited through a messenger to a picnic by men, even an ordinary prostitute (*vesī*) refused to go on the ground that she did not know what sort of men they were. She said, 'I am rich and have many ornaments and, therefore, would not go out of the city to meet strangers.'

The King's Servants

The king was obviously the largest single employer in society. Various kinds of warriors were employed in his service. They were known symbolically through the art of bowmanship (*issithena*) and under the term *yodhājīva*, that is, those living by fighting battles. They included elephant riders (*hatthārohā*), horsemen (*assārohā*), charioteers (*rathika*, different from *rathakāra*), archers (*dhanuggahā*), standard-bearers (*chelakā*), supply corps (*piṇḍadāvikā*), fierce warriors (*ugga*), veteran warriors (*pukkhandino*), warriors in buckskin (*chammayodhino*) and body disposers (*kāraṇikā*).

Among other members forming the corps of the king's servants were ministers, territorial governors, estate managers (*pettanikas*), elephant and horse trainers, policemen (*rāja bhaṭa*), gaolers (*bandhanāgārika*), village headmen, spies and messengers, storekeepers of wood used for the purpose of maintaining fortifications (*dārugaha gaṇaka*), slaves and their families. Over and above these were barbers, tailors and cooks, also in the king's employment.

The *Ṭhāṇāṅga* (third *aṅga* of the Jaina canon) mentions four kinds of wage earners: (i) those who were employed on daily wages (*divasa bhayāe*), (ii) those employed on a journey (*jattā bhayāe*), (iii) those employed for a definite period on stipulated wages to do any type of work (*uchchaṭṭa bhayāe*) and (iv) contractual labourers who received their wages after finishing their work (*kavvala bhayāe*). Though wages were apparently paid in cash, payment in kind must also have been common, especially in the villages.

2.7 Acculturation and the Growth of the Caste System

Acculturation

The post-Vedic centuries saw the beginning of the process of assimilation, acculturation and integration of the aboriginal tribes into the expanding 'Aryan' network at various levels. The Vrātyas are held in the *Atharvaveda* and *sūtra* texts to be the inhabitants of Magadha. 'Vrātya' is a Vedic word derived from *vrāta*, which means a kin-based group. It is said that they neither studied the Vedas nor observed *varṇa* norms, nor did they plough or carry on trade, which shows them to have been basically a pastoral or forest people.

The Vrātyas were non-conformists and were distinguished by

their unorthodox beliefs. Their Ekavrātya cult holds the same esteemed position in the *Atharvaveda* as is ascribed to Indra in the *Rigveda*. Puṃshchali or harlot, associated with the Ekavrātya, represented the female principle, and, together with the cult of Skambha (= *liṅga*, phallus), was probably linked to fertility cults. Vrātya is included in the list of victims at the *Purushamedha* ('human sacrifice').

The description of the Vrātya *grihapati* (their leader) with a turban (*ushṇīsha*), a whip (*pratoda*), a bow (*jyahroda*), black garment and two skins (*ajina*), a rough wagon (*vipatha*—described as the wagon of the easterners in the *Lāṭyāyana Shrautasūtra*), two round ornaments and a *nishka* or ornament of precious metal, suggests that he was a warrior chief. He rode on a cart, probably driven by oxen. He occupied a seat called *āsandi*, which is also mentioned in the *rājasūya* sacrifice.

The other Vrātyas wore upper garments with red border and corded fringes, with strings on each side; each of them had a pair of shoes and doubly-joined goats' hides. The two types of dress and equipment suggest a clear distinction between the chief and his followers. We may note that each one of his followers presented 33 cows to the chief. The *sūtras* speak of warriors (*yauddhas*) and saints (*arhants*) among the Vrātyas. But this division may apply to post-Vedic times to which the *sūtras* belong. The earliest Vrātyas correspond to Shūdras, for they did not read the Veda. The term *arhant* is used for a Buddhist monk, which suggests that by the fifth or fourth century BC Buddhism may have also begun to influence the Vrātyas in eastern India.

The Vrātyas were thus a non-Brahmanized people, unlike the *Shatapatha* migrants (Videgha Māthava group). The Kosalas and the Kāshis are called the offspring of the *Shatapatha* hero Videgha Māthava who migrated to Videha along with his priest Gotama Rāhugaṇa and other Brāhmaṇas, all led in myth by the Fire God Agni Vaishvānara. The story of Videgha Māthava and Agni Vaishvānara suggests the pioneering role of the Kshatriya and Brāhmaṇa settlers in the east of the 'Sadānīrā' (often identified with the modern Gandak, but it could even be the Ghaghara river). (See *The Vedic Age*, Extract 2.1, p. 66, for a translation of the passage.) Being pioneer settlers and farmers, they must have received some privileges from their rulers and chiefs, such as exemption from paying taxes.

The symbols of authority of Vrātya chieftainship such as

turban, chariot, jewels and semi-precious stones suggest that in course of time the Vrātyas adopted the 'Aryan' symbols, and so fused with the expanding Brahmanized order. Indeed, great efforts were made to convert the Vrātyas to the Brahmanic fold. Specific rites, such as the *Vrātyastoma*, were performed to admit them into the Brahmanical community, though with a somewhat low ranking in society. Baudhāyana uses the term Vrātya as a synonym of *varṇasaṃkara* (mixed castes).

The Vrātyas offer an example of acculturation that must have been far more widespread. The mixing of the presumably Vedic Painted Grey Ware people and the pre-NBPW non-Vedic streams (including perhaps the Black-and-Red Ware people) was possibly part of this process, and the interplay might well have been connected with the rise of languages such as Prakrit and Pali.

'Varṇasaṃkaras' (Mixed Castes) and 'Antyas' (Untouchables)

Many *sūtra* text-based studies of social stratification tend to become mere hand-lists of large numbers of *jātis* (castes). In the last three decades, these texts have been revisited from a different standpoint in order to identify elements of change in the broader *varṇa* order. Today, there is a greater appreciation of the varied historical processes, which has dented the older image of the caste system as monolithic and homogenous. It is possible now to see tensions and struggles within the *varṇa* order, and also perceive the operation of exploitative forces within it. (See, for the caste system generally, *The Vedic Age*, Note 2.1, pp. 68–71.)

The post-Vedic centuries saw the emergence of the phenomenon of *varṇasaṃkara* (mixed castes), many of which also got transformed into the category of *antyas* (untouchables). This seems to have happened within the four centuries under study, despite the somewhat qualified social radicalism of the new religions (see Chapter 4). As already noted, the Buddha had indeed denied that any reference can be made to the theory of *jāti* (*jātivāda*) when perfection in wisdom and righteousness are considered. This is comparable with the statement in the *Brihadāraṇyaka Upanishad* (an epitome of the so-called 'Kshatriya *vidyā*' or Kshatriyas' knowledge) that all distinctions vanish in the spiritual realm. And yet, the overall *varṇa–jāti* structure did not show any

substantive sign of ebbing. The *Dharmasūtras* of Āpastamba, Baudhāyana, Gautama and Vasishṭha (*c.* 400–100 BC) reflect this clearly in the relatively more frequent use of both the terms *varṇa* and *jāti*:

Dharmasūtra of	*Occurrences of Varṇa*	*Occurrences of Jāti*
Gautama	14	8
Baudhāyana	24	6
Vasishṭha	12	4
Āpastamba	23	4

Three categories of people apparently were denied any caste status: (1) less assimilated backward aboriginals; (2) degraded artisans; and (3) groups which, through infringement of caste rules or otherwise (association with a region outside the pale of Brahmanism, for example), lost their 'Aryan' status.

The *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* describes the Āndhras, Puṇḍras, Shabaras and Pulindas as *antas* (border peoples), and refers to the forest tribes and hunters as *apachyas* and *nichyas* with their own chiefs; there are copious references to the proximity of and interaction with the larger and better organized Nishādas; the dedication of the Paulkasa to *bībhatsa* (loathsomeness as a deity) in the symbolic human sacrifice (*purushamedha*) in the *Vājasaneyī Saṃhitā* and the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* shows that the Paulkasas were an object of spite and revulsion; and the *Brihadāraṇyaka Upanishad*, where even the Chaṇḍālas and Paulkasas lose their identities, indicates that disparities were growing in the material world, and that these two groups stood at the lowest level of the existing social hierarchy.

The *Dharmasūtras* place the hierarchical position and occupational roles of the four *varṇas* in a legal setting and specify the privileges of the first three twice-born (*dvija*) *varṇas*, demarcating them clearly from the Shūdras, who are saddled with numerous, varied disabilities. The latter include obligatory service to the twice-born and physical toil as landless agricultural labourers, artisans, wage-earners and slaves; denial of initiation with the sacred thread (*upanayana*); exclusion from Vedic study and sacrifices or sacraments with Vedic *mantras*; inequality in matters relating to inheritance, rates of interest and punishment for criminal offences; lack of access to judicial and

administrative positions; and restrictions as to commensality, association and marriage with members of higher *varṇas*.

All the major *Dharmasūtras* are unanimous in prescribing for the Kshatriyas the six-fold duties of study, sacrificing, giving gifts, teaching, sacrificing for others and receiving gifts for the Brāhmaṇas, and participating in battle, protecting people and wielding political, administrative and judicial authority. Gautama permits a Brāhmaṇa to take up agriculture and trade *provided* he does not directly engage himself in it (*a-svayaṃkrite*), and Vasishṭha allows Brāhmaṇas unable to maintain themselves through their lawful occupations (*ajīvantaḥ*) to adopt the Vaishya occupations of agriculture and trade, with restrictions on selling certain commodities, and even directly tilling the land to produce sesame. Baudhāyana maintains that the study of the Veda and practising agriculture impede each other, and prescribes that he who is able to attend to both should do so, and he who is unable to attend to both should give up agriculture. Despite the flexibility shown by the lawgivers under the facade of the *āpaddharma* (conduct and behaviour during emergency), there is no doubt that sizeable sections of wealthy Brāhmaṇas and Kshatriyas tended to withdraw themselves from primary productive activities, and came to broadly represent 'status' and 'power' respectively. The Shūdras substantially provided productive manual labour; and the gap between the elite and the masses thus widened, intensifying the notion of high and low, which, as we have seen above, is reflected in the Pali texts as well.

The social fabric at this time was in much flux, and several professions, crafts and tribes were crystallizing as distinct entities. Neither could their existence be ignored, nor could they be identified with the four existing *varṇas*. This apparently gave rise to the theory of *varṇasaṃkara* or mixed castes, whose origin was traced to a reputed inter-breeding among members of the four *varṇas* and also among their progeny from *anuloma* ('in accordance with the direction of the hair' or in the supposedly natural order, that is, union with a woman of lower *varṇa*, or hypergamous) unions. The relatively superior rating of *anuloma* to *pratiloma* ('against the hair' or against the presumed natural order, or union with a woman of higher order—that is, hypogamous marriage) was due to the prevailing patriarchal mentality. In all, the *Dharmasūtras* mention a total of 24 mixed castes at specified *varṇa*

levels. Some of the *anuloma* castes are the Ambashṭha, Ugra, Nishāda, *Daushmanta* and Pārāshava; while the *pratiloma* castes include Sūta, Āyogava, Vaiṇa, Pulkasa, Vaidehaka, Chaṇḍāla, Mūrdhāvasikta and Shvapāka. That many of the 'mixed' castes suffered degradation is incontrovertible. This is only too evident from specific references to them, and from the application of such generic terms to them as *antya*, *antaḥ*, *bāhya*, *antyaja* and *antyayoni*.

The notion of ritual pollution in relation to the Shūdra had made a fleeting appearance towards the end of the later Vedic period when the use of milk milked by the Shūdra was forbidden at the daily *agnihotra* (oblation to fire). However, as an important characteristic of caste and an enduring feature of social life, it was institutionalized as untouchability only in the *Dharmasūtras*. Untouchability implied the belief in a permanent and hereditary source of pollution vesting in members of particular groups, contact with whom could, therefore, pollute members of higher castes. The group first identified as such untouchables was that of the Chaṇḍālas. The *Gautama Sūtra* speaks of the Chaṇḍāla in the same breath as it does of dogs and crows. The Shvapākas and the Antyavasāyins may be identified as two other untouchable castes at the Chaṇḍāla level.

Most of the primitive tribes, such as Nishādas and Vaiṇas, identified as mixed castes in the *Dharmasūtras*, do not appear to have been a well-knit part of the body politic, but a marginal one. Living originally in a food-gathering stage, they seem to have been mainly hunters of various kinds, who are also known as makers of various kinds of weapons—arrows, bows, and bow-strings. The low material culture and the resultant miserable situation of such tribes is recounted in the Pali texts as 'a life of vagrancy, want and penury, scarcely getting food and drink for their stomachs or clothes for their backs.' It is, therefore, quite probable that these tribes were pushed by the aggrandizement of the settled communities into a lower and lower position till they sank to the ranks of untouchables.

The trends noticed in the *Dharmasūtras*, in respect of social stratification, are also seen in the *Grihyasūtras* and in the *Ashṭādhyāyī* of Pāṇini. Although the details vary, we have information about many new groups being incorporated within the caste framework, affecting their position in the social hierarchy, their prescribed functions, and

their fissions and fusions. Untouchability developed in stages and the number of untouchable castes at the bottom of the scale grew in time. Amongst the few new additions to the list of *antyas* or outcastes were the Mritapas and the Mataṅgas, possibly as subgroups of Chaṇḍālas. Pāṇini's reference to *shūdra-nāma-niravasitanaṃ*, or 'unsegregated Shūdras', implies the existence of a category of segregated Shudras or untouchables.

We come across a Nishāda *gotra* (through indication of the lineage affiliation, this carries an air of status with it) in Pāṇini. This does not occur in any of the standard *gotra* lists. Perhaps we have here an early example of the familiar historical phenomenon of all members of an assimilated tribal group not always being given the same place in the Brahmanical order, and the same tribe breaking up into several *varṇas* and castes. It may also be that the overwhelming majority of the Nishādas remained backward and uninducted, and this prompted the lawgivers to place the caste as a whole at the lowest *anuloma* level, though a fall in the status of a whole tribe from what it enjoyed in later Vedic society cannot be excluded. The Nishādas seem to have continued with their traditional occupation of fishing and hunting even after their absorption in Brahmanical society. The Nesāda of the Pali texts is a hunter *par excellence*, engaging himself in animal killing, fowling and fishing, all professions that lay under Buddhist disapproval.

Though the Buddha is never known to have taught the excellence of the caste system, he did not also advocate its total rejection. Indeed, his theory of *kamma* (or *karma*) could even grant a backdoor entry to that system, in that birth in a low caste may be explained away as the results of *karma* in the previous existence. Buddhist texts consistently placed the Khattiya above the Bamhaṇa in their enumeration of the four *vaṇṇas*; but nowhere do we come across a statement contesting the legitimacy of the division of society into *vaṇṇas* and *jātis*. A hint of the upper castes being an influential group in the *saṃgha* itself is to be found in the *Tittira Jātaka*. Once the Buddha put a question to the *bhikkhus* as to 'who deserves to have the best quarters, the best water, the best food?' He received a reply from some: 'He who was a Khattiya before he became initiated', and from others: 'He who was a Bamhaṇa or a *gahapati*.' There is no doubt that the Buddha was critical of the Bamhaṇas as far as their pretensions as a caste were concerned.

One may note the sarcasm in the following statement of Puṇṇa *therī* about Bamhaṇas' belief that their sins could be washed away by their bathing themselves with water:

> Nay now, who ignorant to the ignorant
> Hath told thee this: that water-baptism
> From evil *kamma* can avail to free?
> Why then the fishes and the tortoises
> The frogs, the water snakes, the crocodiles
> And all that haunts the water straight to heaven
> Will go. . .

And yet, we also see that Pali literature holds the word 'Bamhaṇa' in high esteem, implying a person of high moral character and insight. It is interesting to compare their notion of the Bamhaṇa, with the same delineations in the *Grihyasūtras*, where we get to read the following qualities which a Brāhmaṇa invited to a dinner was expected to possess:

> A (fine) voice, a (dignified) appearance, (a suitable) age, learning, moral character, (right) conduct are the qualities (required). Learning, however, outweighs every (other qualification). One should not pass over a learned (Brahman). (*Shāṅkhāyana Grihyasūtra*)

The narrative of Satyakāma in the *Chhāndogya Upanishad* underlines the quality of honesty and truth it expected of a Brāhmaṇa (*Extract 2.2*), though the example it gives must have been an exceptional one.

Rhys Davids, one of the pioneers of Buddhist studies, said long ago that the 'very means they (Buddhists) adopted to lend weight to their doctrine of emancipation became a weapon to be used against them', in that the theory of transmigration of souls could become an excellent rationale for the present position of an individual in the caste order. In more recent times, Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya concluded that the Buddha created an illusion of liberty, equality, and fraternity by modelling his *saṃgha* on the tribal values, whereas in reality these values were being trampled upon in the world outside the *saṃgha*. But it is uncertain if a tribal regime of equality was practised even within the *saṃgha*.

Data from relatively later texts such as the *Jātakas* on the social background of the births of Bodhisatta have already been cited above (see 2.2 above). It may be noted that lower castes, especially the Suddas (Shūdras) had a very low representation in the *saṃgha*. An analysis of the background of various *theras* (monks) and *therīs* (nuns) mentioned in the *Thera-* and *Therī-gāthās* showed that about 91 per cent of them were *dvijas* (twice born, from the upper three *vaṇṇas*) and only 9 per cent came from a Sudda background. One has only to go through the Pali canonical literature to see how strong in numbers were the Bamhaṇa followers of the Buddha who had rejected the claim of their Brahmanhood by birth in theory, but followed it mostly in practice. According to the Pali canon, many of the sermons of the Buddha were addressed to Bamhaṇas. Moreover, of those monks whose caste origins were recorded by the tradition (mainly in the commentary to the *Thera-gāthā*), about 40 per cent were Brāhmaṇas. The original *saṃgha* thus did not contain a typical cross-section of the population. Rather, in the early *saṃgha*, the high-caste, the wealthy and the educated—three overlapping groups—were heavily over-represented.

Extract 2.1

The Buddha's Counsel to Sīgāla

(*Sīgālaka Sutta* in *Dīgha Nikāya*)

There are five ways in which a son should minister to his mother and father. He should think, 'Having been supported by them, I will support them, I will perform their duties for them. I will keep up the family tradition. I will be worthy of my heritage. . . .' And there are five ways in which the parents, so ministered to by their son, will reciprocate: they will restrain him from evil, support him in doing good, teach him some skill, find him a suitable wife and, in due time, hand over his inheritance to him.

Husbands should respect their wives, and comply as far as possible with their requests. They should not commit adultery. They should give their wives full charge of the home, and supply them with fine clothes and jewellery as far as their means permit. Wives should be thorough in their duties, gentle and kind to the whole household, chaste, and careful in housekeeping, and should carry out their work with skill and enthusiasm.

A man should be generous to his friends, speak kindly of them, act in their interest in every way possible, treat them as his equals, and keep his word to them. They in turn should watch over his interests and property, take

care of him when he is 'off his guard' [i.e., intoxicated, infatuated, or otherwise liable to commit rash and careless actions], stand by him and help him in time of trouble, and respect other members of his family.

Employers should treat their servants and work people decently. They should not be given tasks beyond their strength. They should receive adequate food and wages, be cared for in time of sickness and infirmity, and be given regular holidays and bonus in times of prosperity. They [servants], in turn, should rise early and go to bed late in the service of their master, be content with their just wages, work thoroughly, and maintain their master's reputation.

Extract 2.2

The Story of Satyakāma

Chhāndogya Upanishad, IV.4.1–5. (F. Max Muller's translation, *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. I, p. 60, slightly modified.)

1. Satyakāma, the son of Jabālā addressed his mother and said: 'I wish to become a student (*brahmachārin*), mother. Of what family am I?'

2. She said to him: 'I do not know, my child, of what family you are. In my youth when I had to move about much as a servant, I conceived you. I do not know of what family you are. I am Jabālā by name; you are Satyakāma; say that you are Satyakāma Jābāla.'

3. He went to Gautama Hāridrumata and said to him, 'I wish to become your student, Sir. May I come to you, Sir?'

4. He said to him, 'Of what family are you, my friend?' He replied: 'I do not know, Sir, of what family I am. I asked my mother, and she answered: "In my youth, when I had to move about much as a servant, I conceived you. I do not know of what family you are. I am Jabālā by name; you are Satyakāma." I am, therefore, Satyakāma Jābāla, Sir.'

5. He said to him: 'No one but a true Brāhmaṇa would thus speak out. Go and fetch fuel, friend, I shall initiate you. You have not swerved from the truth.'

Note 2.1

Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW)

Amongst artifacts that archaeologists come across during excavations, pottery types are usually the most conspicuous. Often, they are found in great abundance and seen as the major indicator of the lifestyle of the common people. We must, however, resist the temptation to link these manifestations of human activities with any specific ethnic community. There had been a tendency amongst Indian archaeologists to persist with the theory of 'one ware, one people', that is, each ceramic type

would represent one set of people. Thus, for instance, the Painted Grey Ware (PGW) was sought to be designated as 'Aryan' pottery. Just as one can expect to find utensils made of more than one metal (copper, brass, steel, etc.) or of different materials (plastic and clay) in the kitchen of a modern household, similarly it ought to be assumed that in the remote past, too, a set of people could produce and use more than one ceramic type. Several pottery types often overlap in their geographical and chronological spread and show elements of continuity in their technologies. The Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) has been one of the most distinctive sets of pottery found at sites datable to our period.

First described by Cunningham in the late nineteenth century, it was found in a stratigraphic context in the early twentieth century at Sarnath and Bhita and then later at Bhir Mound at Taxila. In the beginning, described as 'fine black lustrous' and 'Greek Black Ware', archaeologists were uncertain about its origin. Some thought that it was imported from the west rather than locally produced. This view is no longer held. R.E.M.Wheeler and Krishna Deva were the first to name it 'Northern Black Polished Ware' (NBPW) in 1946. This nomenclature apparently identified a couple of features associated with the ware, viz., its concentration in northern India and the nature and colour of its polish (see *Figure 2.2*). Wheeler and Deva identified 18 sites containing NBPW, all within the Ganga basin. Today, however, more than 600 sites of the ware are known with an almost subcontinental expanse.

The geographical distribution of the NBPW shows the northernmost site to be Udegram in Swat, though Charsadda and Taxila are the more extensive ones in that direction; the southernmost limit is marked by Chebrolu (district Guntur, Andhra Pradesh), farther to the south than the better known sites of Amaravati and Dharanikota (also in Andhra Pradesh). The westernmost site is Prabhas on the Kathiawad littoral (Gujarat) and the easternmost are Bangarh (district West Dinajpur) and Chandraketugarh (district 24 Parganas, West Bengal). Thus, the spread of the ware can claim a larger area, 2121 km (north to south) and 1790 km (east to west), than any other known ceramic type of ancient India.

The origin of NBPW seems to lie in eastern Uttar Pradesh and western Bihar (where its sites are concentrated and from which its earliest dates come) (see *Map 2.1*). Its diffusion over most of India must have been gradual and dependent on the distance from the epicentre. It has been variously conjectured that this expansion followed in the wake of the expansion of the Magadhan empire, especially in the times of the Mauryas, or of the spread of the use of iron. The fact probably is that being the distinctive ceramic component of the earlier part of the early historical period, it travelled with the culture itself. Most archaeological reports relate important changes in material culture to the date of its introduction at particular sites.

At Rajghat (Varanasi), one of the principal early sites, NBPW accounts for nearly 50 per cent of the total pottery recovered from the 'early' and 'late' phases, wherein two clear groups are visible: monochrome and bichrome. All monochrome specimens have a fine, thin fabric. They are made of well-levigated clay and invari-

ably potted on a fast wheel and have a strikingly lustrous surface. The surface colour of about 90 per cent specimens in this group is jet-black, brownish black or bluish black. The remaining 10 per cent are steel-blue, pinkish, silvery, golden, brown, chocolate, violet or deep red. The core colour is blackish grey, but in some cases reddish. The best specimens have a glossy surface with metallic sheen and it is difficult to scratch their surface even with a knife. The coarser varieties are thicker and soft and can be scratched. Bichrome NBPW, as the name implies, shows a combination of two colours. Otherwise, it shares all the features of the monochrome group. It occurs less frequently. Some specimens have designs comprising thick and thin horizontal bands, vertical strokes, circular bands or arches. From Champa we have quite a few white-painted specimens.

The shapes in the NBPW are almost totally represented by: (1) the dish with inverted or straight sides; (2) the bowl with straight, convex, corrugated or tapering sides; (3) the lid with flat terminal; and (4) the sharply carinated *handi*. These shapes are shared by the NBPW with the Painted Grey Ware (PGW) and the northern Black-and-Red Ware (BRW), with both of which it partially overlapped both in space and in time.

Excavations at NBPW sites have brought to light a number of wares associated with the NBPW but differing from region to region. But what is important is

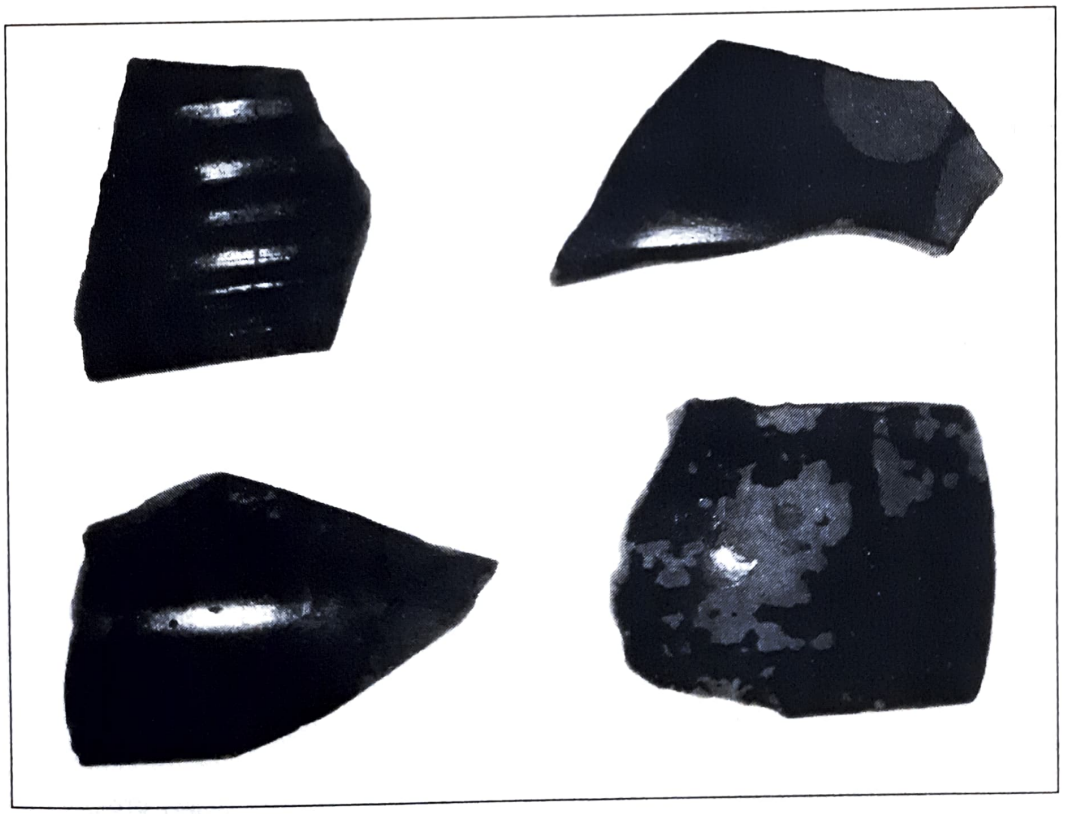


FIGURE 2.2 Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW): sherds from Atranjikhera
(Photograph: Ghulam Mujtaba)

that NBPW occurs in two clear-cut contexts. In the 'earlier' phase it is associated with northern Black-and-Red Ware, black-slipped ware, plain grey ware, Painted Gray Ware, red-slipped ware and coarse red ware. In its 'later' phase it is mainly met along with coarse grey ware and red ware. The typology of the vessels considerably changed in the late phase of the NBPW. The frequency of the bowl and dish decreases but that of the basin and vase increases. At several sites, the NBPW and its associated wares show some indications of decoration and graffiti.

Chronology

In view of the understanding that the first appearance and subsequent dispersal of the NBPW marked distinctive changes in the material life of the people, the determination of its chronology is naturally to be greatly desired.

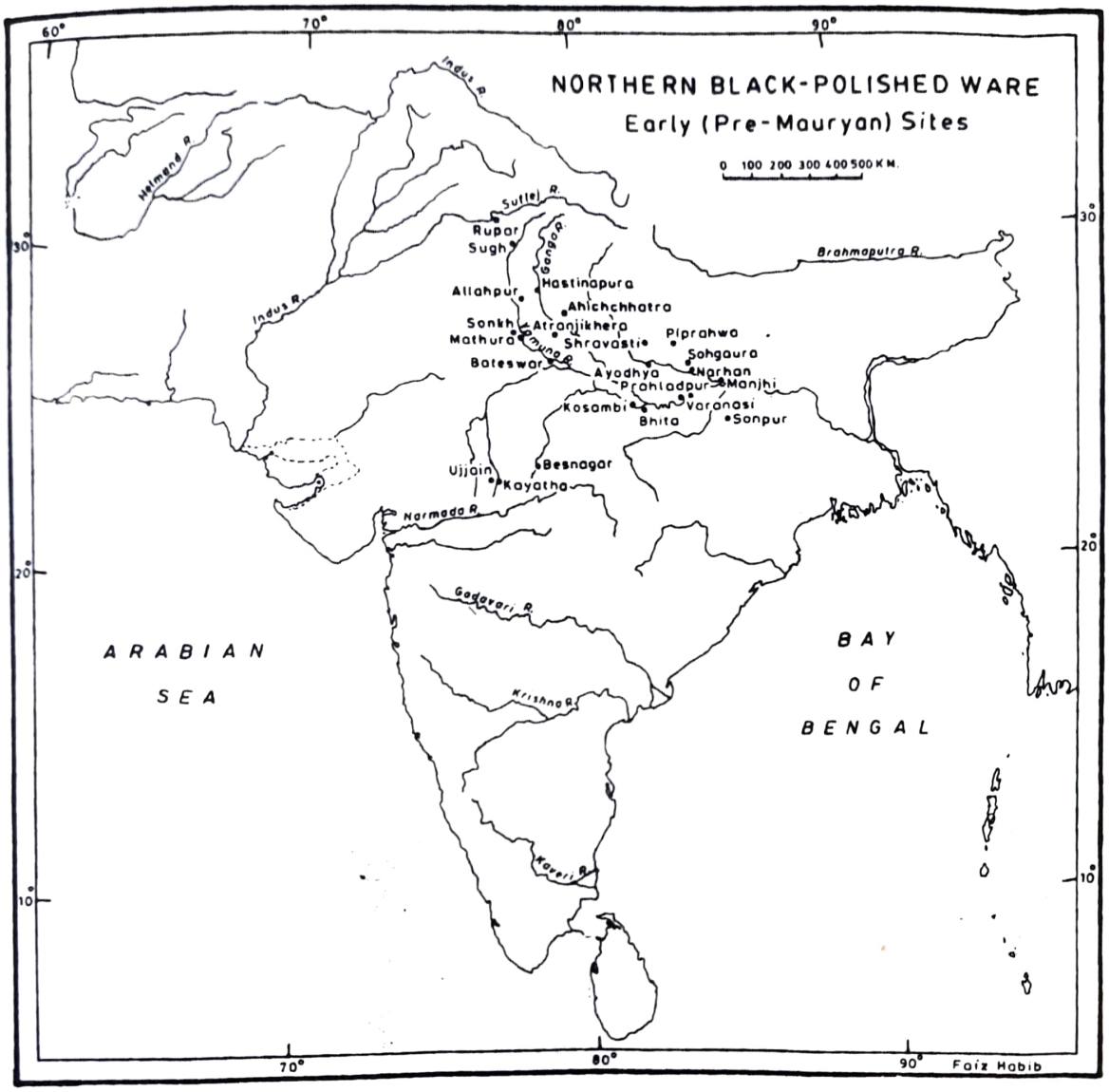
The appearance of NBPW was first dated to 500 BC based on the evidence from Taxila. The date was pushed back to 600 BC, when Hastināpura (near Meerut in Uttar Pradesh) was excavated in the 1950s. Recently, even a beginning around 700 BC has come to be advocated on the basis of the thickness of deposits at Shriṅgaverapura below the first occurrence of punch-marked coins. Though it is a risky procedure to date sites based on the thickness of deposits, especially when exposure is limited to a few square metres, some important trends in this regard may be noted. Generally, occupational deposits in the settlements of Iron–NBPW phase, viz., Champā, Sonpur, Taradih, Rajgir, Maner (all in Bihar), Prahladpur (district Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh), Shriṅgaverapura (near Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh), are thicker than in the pre-NBPW phase. This is also true of Kaushāmbi, Shrāvasti, Rajghat, Sohgaura (district Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh) and Narhan. However, the NBPW complexes in the plains of eastern Uttar Pradesh and north Bihar, though older, are generally less thick in deposits than those in the plains south of the Ganga in Bihar.

Again, since the chronology of the first appearance of coinage in South Asia is debatable (see *Note 1.1*), taking punch-marked coins as the basis of stratification of an archaeological site can be validly objected to. As for the radiocarbon dates, only the erratic series of measurements from Bateswar (district Agra, Uttar Pradesh) and Mathura place the appearance of NBPW prior to the mid-sixth century BC. The problem is aggravated by the fact that the published reports often use terms such as 'early', 'mid-phase' and 'later' in a manner that is only impressionistic.

A comparison of ^{14}C dates with stratigraphical dates at sites of various regions indicates that the ware did not appear at all sites at one and the same time. The dates of sites representing four *mahājanapadas*, e.g. Hastināpura (Kuru), Ahichchhatra (Pañchāla), Kaushāmbi (Vatsa) and Rajghat (Kāsi) are also not consistent. Even the dates of neighbouring sites (Hastināpura and Ahichchhatra, on the one hand, and Kaushāmbi and Rajghat, on the other) differ.

Taking into account 30 radiocarbon dates of the end of the pre-NBPW phase and the NBPW phases described as 'early' and 'mid'/'pre-Mauryan', Erdosy dates the three phases of NBPW as: 'Early': 550–400 BC; 'Middle': 400–250 BC; and

MAP 2.1 Northern Black Polished Ware: Early (Pre-Mauryan) Sites



the 'Late': 250–100 BC. It must, however, be urged that the borderlines between NBP's early and mid-phases are not as firm as Erdosy assumes, nor can carbon dates (with calibration for the period being still debatable) be used to establish chronology as precisely as Erdosy has tried to do. One can only say, in general, that the archaeological context at sites like Shrāvasti, Kaushāmbi and Rajghat shows that the peak period of the occurrence of the ware at sites in eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar is between 550 and 300 BC, after which its manufacture and use there become scarcer.

Technology

As far as the ware's technology is concerned, it seems that the black polish or slip of the NBPW is the result of (1) reducing fire, (2) the fineness of the *kabiz*

or slip and the iron oxide added to it, and (3) the degree of temperature. While the first two conditions are essential for the black polish, the temperature determines whether it would be matt, glossy or glossy with metallic sheen. It also determines the hardness of the ware. Thus, the ware which has received the lowest temperature is soft and has a matt surface. The ware which has received a higher temperature is glossy and hard, but the one which has received the greatest heat is the hardest and bears a metallic sheen on it. The degree of heat given to the ware can also be broadly determined from the sound it gives when struck.

Note 2.2

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Ram Sharan Sharma, *Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India*, Delhi, 1983, Chapters V–VII, is marked by a meticulous and analytical utiliza-

tion of both literary and archaeological evidence. His *Perspectives in Social and Economic History of Early India*, New Delhi, 2003, also covers many aspects included in this chapter. The chapter on 'Varṇa Influence on Marriage Forms and Practices' in the latter work is particularly illuminating.

Two studies on settlement archaeology are: Makkhan Lal, *Settlement History and Rise of Civilization in the Ganga-Yamuna Doab from 1500 BC–300 AD*, Delhi, 1984, and George Erdosy, *Urbanization in Early Historic India*, Oxford, 1988. For a critique of methods and conclusions of Makkhan Lal and George Erdosy, see Satyendra Kumar Jha, *Beginnings of Urbanization in Early Historic India: A Study of the Gangetic Plains*, Patna, 1998. See F.R. Allchin, *et al.*, *The Archaeology of Early Historic South Asia: The Emergence of Cities and States*, Cambridge, 1995, for a general survey.

Dilip K. Chakrabarti, *The Archaeology of Ancient Indian Cities*, Oxford, 1995, is a comprehensive survey of empirical archaeological data on urban centres, and seeks to work out regional patterns in the early urban history of India. The chronological span covered is quite extensive, from the protohistoric to the early historic, coming down to *c.* 300 AD and later. Chakrabarti's *The Archaeological Geography of the Ganga Plain: The Lower and the Middle Ganga*, New Delhi, 2001, is a complementary work.

Ahmad Hasan Dani, *The Historic City of Taxila*, Paris, 1986, is an extensive study of a major town of early historic times.

For archaeological evidence, the major work of reference is A. Ghosh, ed., *An Encyclopaedia of Indian Archaeology*, Vol. I: Subjects; Vol. II: A Gazetteer of Explored and Excavated Sites in India, New Delhi, 1989. The work is relevant for all units in this monograph, where archaeological evidence has been invoked, though there is now need to update this enormously useful work.

3
Polities and Formation of States

3.1 The *Janapadas*

It is argued that both the rise of Buddhism (and, by implication, other contemporary currents of thought as well) and the rise of absolutism were products of the same age. At one level, there is an obvious chronological overlap between the two phenomena. But something more is signified by this hypothesis.

Absolutism is generally held to have begun with the process of formation of the *janapada,* a territorial unit unheard of in Vedic literature. Buddhist texts often refer to sixteen *mahājanapadas* ('Great *Janapadas*'). These are recounted as:

Aṅga (modern Bhagalpur–Monghyr region of Bihar) with its capital at Champā.

Magadha (south Bihar), its capital being Rājagaha (Rajgir), shifted later to Pāṭaliputra (Patna).

Kāsi (in southeastern Uttar Pradesh), with its capital at Varanasi.

Kosala (largely comprising modern eastern Uttar Pradesh), divided into two regions by the Sarayu river, with Sāvatthi (Mahet) and Kushāvatī as capitals of north and south Kosala respectively.

Vajji (in north Bihar, a confederacy of eight or nine clans including the Videhans, Lichchhavis, Jñātrikas and the Vajjis), Vesāli being its major seat.

Malla (in northeastern Uttar Pradesh), another confederacy of about nine clans; Kusinārā and Pāvā being its important towns.

Chedi (modern Bundelkhand).

Vachchha (the region around modern Allahabad); its capital was Kosāmbi.

Kuru (in western Uttar Pradesh and Haryana), Hastināpura and Indraprastha (Delhi) being both located within it.

Pañchāla (in western Uttar Pradesh), Ahichchhatra and Kāmpilya serving as capital cities of north and south Pañchāla respectively.

Machchha (territory around modern Jaipur in eastern Rajasthan), Virāṭa (Bairat) being an important settlement of the region.

Sūrasena ('Soursenoi' of the Greek writers), with Mathura as its capital.

Assaka (if identified with the 'Assakenoi' of the Greek accounts, then it would be located in the Indus basin. However, sometimes it is also located south of the Vindhyas, since Potana or Potali [modern Patan in Maharashtra] is mentioned in the Pali texts as the capital of Assaka.)

Avanti (or Malwa, in western Madhya Pradesh), Ujjayinī or Ujjeni (Ujjain) being its capital.

Gandhāra (northwestern Punjab), with its capital at Takkhasīla or Taxila.

Kāmboja (Kabul valley, Afghanistan, generally paired with Yona in Ashoka's inscriptions.)

In the listing of the famous sixteen *mahājanapadas*, some Pali texts give paired names. Thus, for example, in the *Janavasabha Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya* we have references to Kāsi–Kosala, Vajji–Malla, Kuru–Pañchāla and Machchha–Sūrasena. Elsewhere, Aṅga–Magadha also occurs. Apparently, these paired *mahājanapadas* had coalesced in course of time.

In the *Dīgha Nikāya*, the following clans are also mentioned: (1) The Bullis of Allakappa, (2) the Koḷiyas of Rāmagāma, (3) the Moriyas of Pipphalivana, (4) the Bhaggas of Sumsimara and (5) the Kālāmas of Kesaputta. Apart from occasional references to the Koḷiyas and Kālāmas elsewhere, we have little or no knowledge of these groups.

Most of these *mahājanapadas* belong to northern and northwestern India. None of them was situated in the Deccan (except possibly the Assakas), and none in Sindh, Bengal, Assam and Orissa.

Kosala with its capital Sāvatthi and its king Pasenadi, are frequently mentioned in the Pali canon. 871 *suttas* are said to have been preached by the Buddha in Sāvatthi. Of these, *Dīgha Nikāya* accounts

for six, *Majjhima* has 75, *Saṃyutta* has the maximum, viz., 736, and 54 occur in the *Aṅguttara*. The king Pasenadi was more widely known than his contemporary kings of other *janapadas*: Bimbisāra and Ajātasattu (of Magadha), Pajjota (of Avanti) and Udena (of Vachchha). The whole of the third *Saṃyutta*, consisting of 25 anecdotes, each with a moral message, is devoted to the king of Kosala, and there are about an equal number of references to him in other parts of the literature. In contrast, there are in the first four *nikāyas* only six *suttas* mentioning Bimbisāra and only two each refer to Udena and Pajjota.

The Jaina lists of *mahājanapadas* tend to be somewhat different. These lists are decidedly later, for *mahājanapadas* such as Kuru, Pañchāla, Sūrasena, Gandhāra, and Kāmboja, are excluded from the list of 16. They include several additional ones such as Vaṅga, Lāḍha (Rāḍha), Achcha, Avaha, and Padha (Pandya). Some of these are not even identifiable. In a still longer list, comprising 25½ *janapadas*, while some of the names of the famous sixteen *mahājanapadas* of the Pali texts do find a place, the *mahājanapadas* of the northwest (Kāmboja, Gandhāra) are missing. Some of the noticeable names of this longer enumeration of *mahājanapadas* are Kaliṅga, Jāṅgala (perhaps a substitute for north Pañchāla), Suraṭṭha, Videha, Dasaṇṇa, Kegaiaḍḍha (i.e., half of Kekaya). (See also *Note 1.1* for *janapadas* deduced from punch-marked coin issues.)

By Pāṇini's time (*c.* 350 BC) much of South Asia was parcelled out among *janapadas*, representing clearly demarcated territorial units, rather than, as previously, mere aggregations of people. This is reinforced by the attribute '*bhūpati*' ('lord of the earth'), accorded to rulers by Pāṇini. Pāṇini is known to have referred to 175 *janapadas* or territories—most of them in the northwest, perhaps because he is considered to have belonged to that area. Pāṇini shows an awareness of Kapishi (Begram) and Kāmboja in the northwest, Kachchha and Sindhu in the west, and Ashmaka (Assaka), which, as we have seen, can be located along the Godavari river in peninsular India.

The Pali texts list *janapadas* as the largest in a series of administrative units which also includes *gāma* (village), *nigama* (township) and *nagara* (town). In Kauṭilya's *Arthashāstra*, *janapada* is treated as one of the seven constituents ('limbs') of a state, representing the territory it occupies. Individual *janapadas* were doubtless

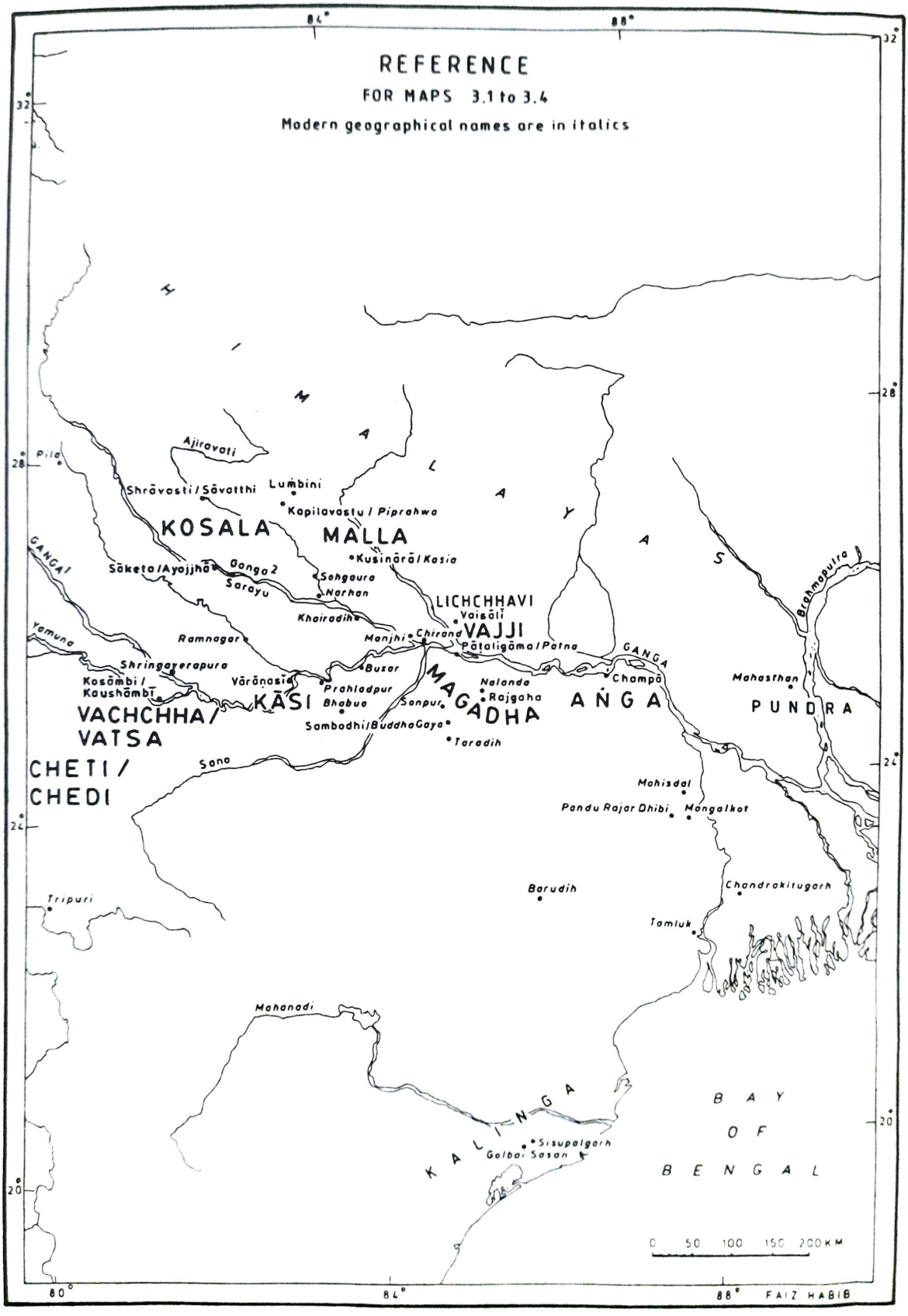
absorbed by larger territories, through conquests, and this led to the emergence of the 16 *mahājanapadas*. The process of coalescence continued thereafter, as is seen in the growth of the kingdom of Magadha. Within the Mauryan empire a *janapada* seems to have signified a province, or sub-province, for Ashoka's inscriptions have several references to this term in this sense.

Over the *Mahājanapadas* there appear to have prevailed two distinct forms of political authority, designated *rājya* (monarchy) and *gaṇa* (loosely but wrongly translated as 'republic'; perhaps it would be better to see it as just 'non-monarchy').

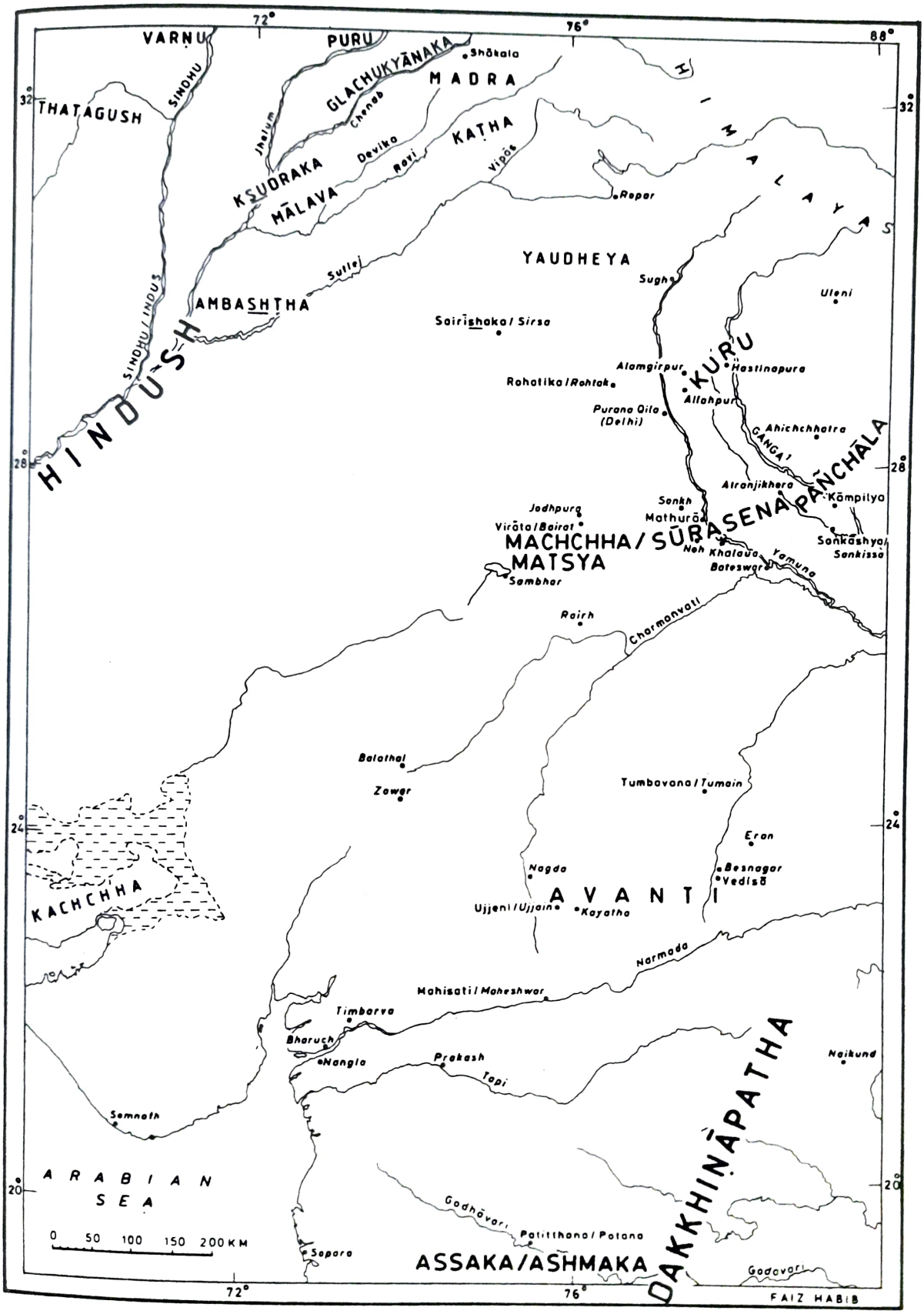
Most of the *mahājanapadas* were, in fact, monarchical polities, and only a few were non-monarchies, such as lay in the Himalayan Terai. The Buddha, on more than one occasion, spoke eloquently about the strength of the non-monarchies, especially referring to their social cohesiveness. Ajātasattu, the king of Magadha, casting his eyes on the Lichchhavis, was forewarned by the Buddha about the consequences of his aggressive designs as long as such cohesiveness continued among the Lichchhavis. No wonder the Magadhan ruler could succeed only after he was able to sow seeds of dissension among the Lichchhavis through the machinations of his minister Vassakāra. However, internecine squabbles amongst monarchies themselves were also not infrequent. Thus, the kingdoms of Magadha, Kāsi, Kosala, Avanti and Vachchha were engaged in constant conflicts with one another. Tussles between Vachchha and Avanti and between Kosala and Magadha are narrated in literary texts, notwithstanding the matrimonial relations that existed between their rulers. That the kingdom of Magadha was able to subdue a large number of these *mahājanapadas* (see 3.5 below), is an indication of how 'strong monarchies' came into being through success in these struggles.

Big kingdoms such as those of Magadha, Kosala, Kāsi, and Vachchha provided sources of patronage to the Buddha and other religious leaders. The commonality between the new political systems and new religious systems may be seen in their common affiliation to the new socio-economic ethos. Vedism, apparently, was rooted deeply in the rural ethos but was now out of tune with the money-based urban culture, the basis of the new monarchical states, and the main source of patronage for the new religions. The past scorn for the inhabitants of the

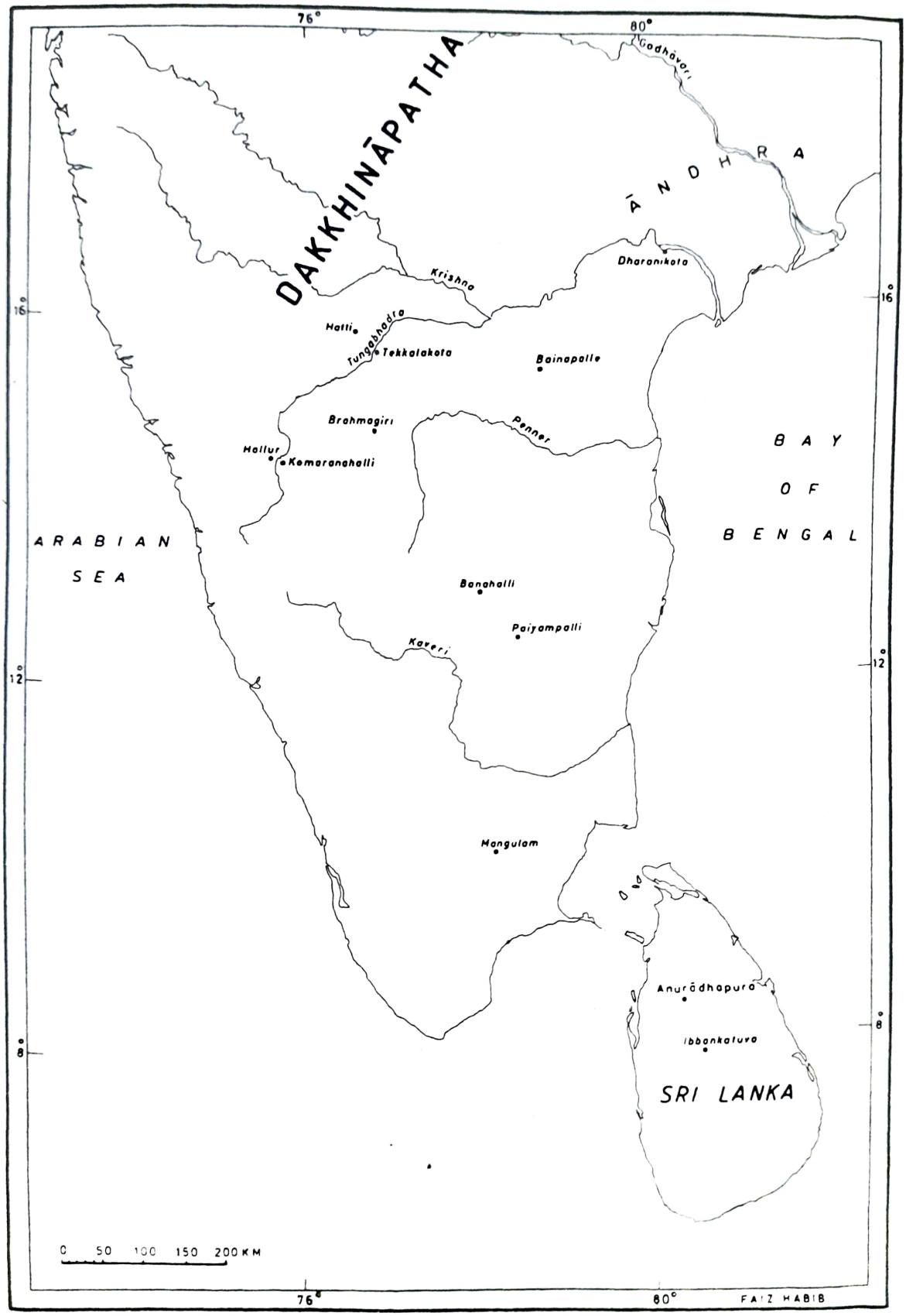
MAP 3.1 Eastern India



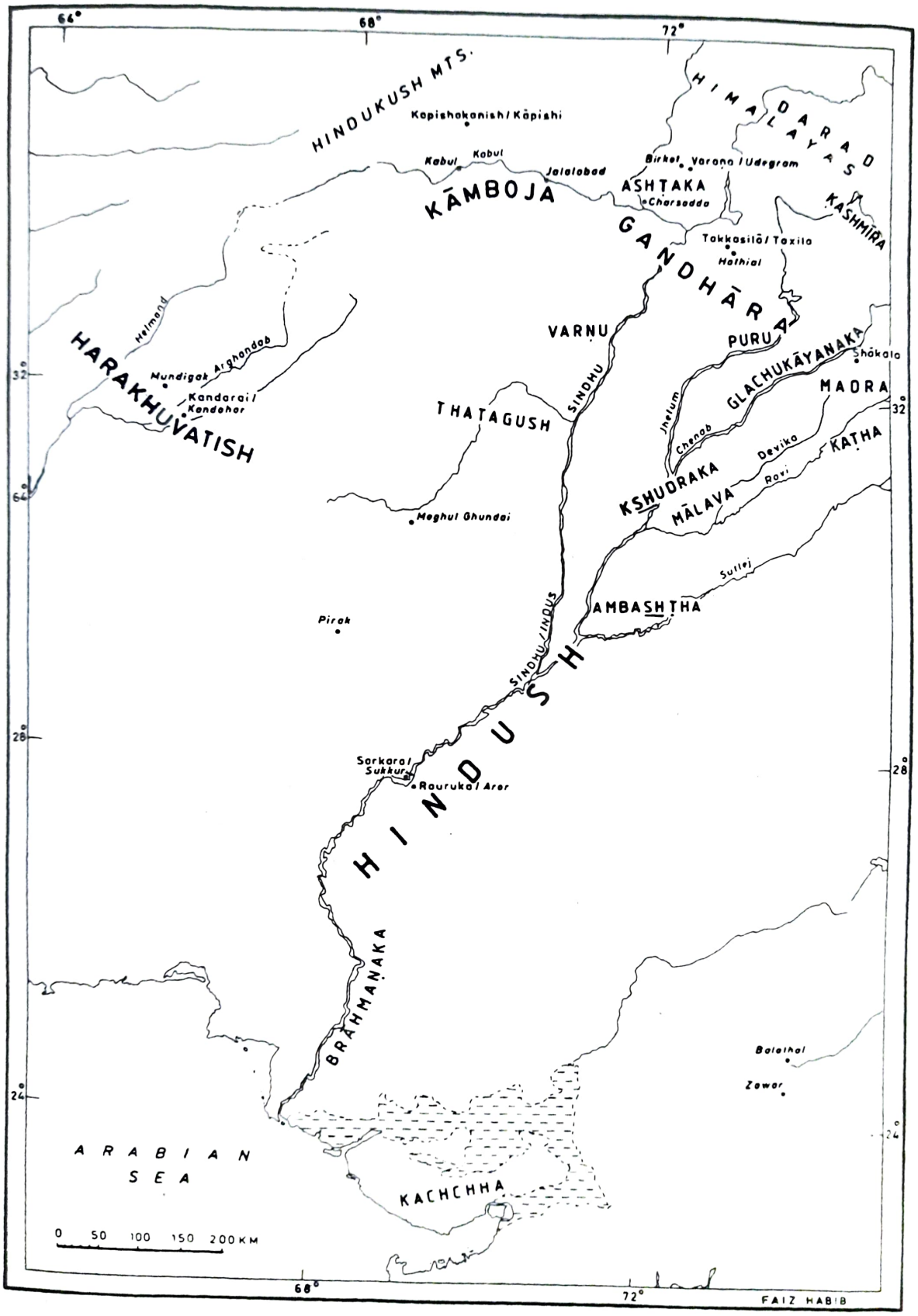
MAP 3.2 Northern and Central India



MAP 3.3 The South



MAP 3.4 The Northwest



east, specially those of Aṅga and Magadha in the later Vedic texts, set limits to the success of Brahmanization here. As Herman Oldenberg suggested in 1881, with reference to the Videgha Māthava legend of the *Shatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, the success of Buddhism in its native eastern region could partly be attributed to this fact. Moreover, as this region also became the cradle of the strongest monarchical states, viz., Magadha and Kosala, the religious movements influential here also acquired higher status.

The new religions questioned, at least in the spiritual sphere, not only the bases of social organization, viz. the *varṇa* order, but also the grounds on which the older political authority was legitimized by the Brāhmaṇas. Many kings were far from being men of noble or exalted origins. That quite a few of them may even have been of obscure origins necessitated a different, non-Brahmanical mode of legitimization, and this was made possible by the teachings of the Buddha, Mahāvīra, Makkhali Gosāla and other non-Brahmanical teachers, who denied the sanctity of Brahmanical ritual and in whose perception of the existing social structure the 'Khattiyas' ranked above the 'Bamhaṇas'.

Just as the Buddha sided with the *gahapatis* when he had to arbitrate between them and monks (see 2.4), similarly, in respect of matters pertaining to the kings too, he took the side of caution. An illustrative case is his enunciation of the principle that no runaway soldier would be accepted in the *saṃgha*—the occasion for this was a complaint on this matter by king Bimbisāra of Magadha. Similarly, in the kingdom of Kosala, Makkhali Gosāla had to come to terms with the exhortations of king Pasenadi.

The new ideal of a monarchical state serving different sections of society, rather than merely showering bounty on the Brāhmaṇas, is brought out by the counsel received by the legendary king Mahāvijita:

> The king's *janapada* is harassed and oppressed. The *gāmas*, *nigamas* and *nagaras* are being destroyed (either by robbers or king's officers). Roads are unsafe. So long as the *janapada* is in this state, it is most unwise to levy fresh taxes. Even if the king manages to stop the scoundrels' game by degradation, banishment and fines,

> and by putting some to death, their license cannot be satisfactorily put a stop to. The remnant left unpunished would still go on harassing the *janapada*. The king should supply the peasants and cattle keepers with seeds and fodder, should give capital to the trader and pay wages and food to the employees in his service. Then these men, following each his own business, will no longer harass the *janapada*; the king's revenue will go up; the *janapada* will be quiet and at peace; and the people pleased with one another and happy, and, cradling their children in their arms, will dwell with open doors. (*Kūṭadanta Sutta, Dīgha Nikāya*)

Though kings were the largest single employers of the workforce, the limits of royal 'absolutism' need also to be kept in view. As the earlier tribes were usually rather small, the inhabitants of a *mahājanapada* could not all have belonged to the tribe that gave it its name. The state had to seek the allegiance of the various social or ethnic units within its territory. Simultaneously, the rulers had to establish control over their own kinsmen, who now held subordinate positions. Thus while the terms Mālava and Kshudraka convey ruling status, the terms Mālavya and Kshaudrakya convey a subject's status. More or less, a similar distinction is drawn between the ruling Shākyas and Koḷiyas, on the one hand, and their slaves and servants, on the other. Such stratification co-existed with a new sense of territoriality. In the *Majjhima Nikāya* there is the famous statement of Pasenadi, highlighting his sense of identity with the Buddha: 'The Master is a Khattiya, I too am a Khattiya; the Master is a Kosalan, I too am a Kosalan.' The territorial consciousness intertwines here with consciousness of caste or status.

That the *mahājanapadas* could not function with an unbridled 'absolutism' may also be seen in the new thinking on the question of the origin of kingship. The post-Vedic centuries are marked by the earliest theoretical expositions of this matter. Sanskrit texts largely focus on the divine origin of the king. In one such myth, after the tyrannous Veṇa (the traditional progenitor of the Nishādas) was killed by the enraged *rishis* or sages, the chief first created by the *rishis* was the swarthy Nishāda who was expelled to the forest to become a hunter. Thereafter Prithu was created king, and he introduced agriculture and farming. Royalty is thus seen as a gift of Brahmanical sages.

Pali texts tend to legitimize kingly authority in terms of a 'social contract', which tied down both the king (called *khattiya*, the lord of the field) and his subjects. The whole concept of such an origin of kingship is set in the context of a state of anarchy epitomized by thefts taking place in paddy fields (understandably so because the concerned texts are situated in the middle Ganga valley). People, therefore, decided to 'elect' a 'king', who was expected to offer them protection and restore order, and in return, was promised a share of the produce. A graphic description of such a 'social contract' is found in the *Aggañña Sutta* (*Dīgha Nikāya*) (*Extract 3.1*).

When Sanskrit texts mention such 'social contract', they differ qualitatively from the descriptions of the theory in the Pali texts. One major difference between the two is the mode of appointment of the head of the state. While Pali texts underline some kind of an election or selection by the people, Sanskrit texts not only emphasize the divine origin of the 'king', but also subscribe to his 'divine right' to rule.

Notwithstanding these differences, it is equally certain that these theories were put forward to justify the functioning of the new 'despotic' state and to assert and legitimize its rights to collect taxes. Therefore, though some tradition of consensus may have survived as a tribal legacy, deliberate efforts were now made to win consent and acceptability for the monarchical state. It may also have been found necessary to protect the institutions of property and patriarchal family, the chief concerns of the members of the upper *varṇas*, by asserting the ruler's obligation in this regard.

In the *rājyas* or monarchies, the administration grew from a few general office-holders under the ruler's direct command to a hierarchically structured bureaucracy, whose principal constituents are mentioned by Pāṇini, and described in detail by Kauṭilya in later times. This administrative machinery was apparently centralized, supported by regularly collected taxes and a standing army (as distinct from militia gathered for the occasion). Rituals remained important but no longer played a vital role—perhaps hereditary kingship had less need for ritual, since it required a different kind of legitimization.

Both the northeastern and northwestern regions of India, where the *gaṇas* or tribes (non-monarchies) were concentrated, were

regarded with disapproval by the seers of *Madhyadesha* (essentially the upper Ganga plains), who may have deliberately excluded surviving tribal institutions from their traditional narratives. The *gaṇas* may be viewed as either antecedents or alternatives to the *rājyas* (monarchies), even if they survived alongside the latter for nearly a millennium. Differences between them were found not just in the political sphere, but possibly in the cultural domain as well. Although both relied on a professional bureaucracy, in monarchies the ruler was able to free himself from interference by his kinsmen in decision-making; in the *gaṇas* the chief was not able to do so. Most of the *gaṇas*, however, had no chance to evolve into monarchies as they were conquered before completing the transition. Even a confederation of oligarchies under the Lichchhavis could not resist the advances of monarchical Magadha, where a centralized political system strove to maximize economic resources in the service of the state. However, the reappearance of many *gaṇas* after the Mauryas, especially in the Punjab and the northwest, indicates the limits of the absorptive potentialities of the *rājyas*.

3.2 Polities in Northwestern India

The two *mahājanapadas* out of the 16 listed in the Buddhist texts that we can definitely place in India's northwest are those of Kāmboja (Kabul valley) and Gandhāra (northwestern Punjab, with its capital Takkhasīla or Taxila near modern Islamabad in Pakistan). These must have come under the tutelage of the Achaemenian empire of Iran, for the Iranian emperor Dārayavaush ('Darius I') (522–486 BC) claimed to have control over Gadara (Gandhāra), Thatagush (Gomal basin, NWFP) and Harukhvatish (Qandahar region, Afghanistan), as well as Hindush (the ancestral word for India, but possibly originally representing Sindh, whose name represents the Indian version of the Iranian 'Hindu'). The Achaemenian control over these territories was fairly long-lasting, since not only does Darius I's successor Khshayārsha ('Xerxes') (486–65 BC) claim them individually by name, but so does Artakhshāsha ('Artaxerxes II') (405–359 BC), to whom allegiance was paid by subjects from these four provinces (again named). According to the Greek historian Herodotus (*c.* 484–*c.* 425 BC), Darius I sent a Greek, Skylax, on an expedition sailing down the Indus from the city of Kaspatyrus and the country of Paktyce (both not satisfactorily identified)

until he reached the sea, by which he could make a voyage to the Red Sea. He also tells us that Darius' seventh satrapy comprising Sattagydia (Gomal), Gandara (Gandhāra), etc., paid 170 talents of silver, but 'India' (Sindh?) paid the largest sum of all satrapies—360 talents of gold dust—being 'the most populous of all the nations of the world'. Indian contingents served in Achaemenian armies, being also present on the Iranian side in Darius III's last battle with Alexander in 331 BC. But either the Achaemenid yoke on the Indus basin had already weakened considerably, or collapsed after the defeat of Darius III in 331 BC, the fact remains that when Alexander undertook his campaigns in the region in 327–325 BC, there was not a single occasion when he encountered any Achaemenian satrap or governor or any other remnant of Achaemenid authority.

What Alexander found, on the other hand, was a number of independent kingdoms, hill-tribes, the so-called 'city-states' and non-monarchical polities. Most of these are mentioned in the Greek accounts, based in large part on narratives left behind by officers who had accompanied the invader. Very few of these states are noticed in Sanskrit, Pali and Prakrit texts, which are often invoked to describe the geographical spread of the *mahājanapadas*. Occasionally, however, identifications have been worked out with certain polities alluded to by Pāṇini, which are generally located in the Punjab and northwest India. While a few of these states resisted Alexander with some determination, as for instance did 'Porus' (so called perhaps after the name of the ancient tribe Puru), whose kingdom lay between the rivers Jhelum (Vitastā or 'Hydaspes' of Greek accounts) and Chenab (Asiknī or 'Acesines' of Greek accounts), there were others who surrendered easily enough, and there were some (like 'Taxiles'/'Omphis' or Āmbhi, the king of Taxila, and the 'city-state' of 'Nysa'), who even welcomed the invader and helped him with material resources.

Some of these polities may be enumerated as follows:

(a) *Powers located to the west of the Indus*

Astakenoi, whose people were possibly known as Ashṭakas and whose capital was Pushkalāvatī (Charsadda).

Hill-tribes, viz., Aspasioi and Assakenoi (part of Swat and Buner), which may have been the same as Ashvāyana and Ashvakāyana

('land of horses') mentioned by Pāṇini. The capital of the Assakenoi is called Massaga by the Greeks. The city was strong in fortifications, built on a hill with inaccessible sides, treacherous morasses on two sides, a rivulet on the third, and an artificial rampart of bricks, stone and timber on its fourth side. The fortress was further protected by a deep moat dug along its entire circumference of about seven kilometres. The Assakenois opposed Alexander with a large army, together with 7,000 mercenaries recruited from the plains, who were all stationed in the fortress of Massaga.

The hill fort known as Aornas, corresponding possibly to Varaṇa of Pāṇini's *Aṣhṭādhyāyī*, was apparently in the Pir Sar range, not far from the junction of the Kabul and Indus rivers.

(b) *Between the Indus and the Beas*
(Vipāsh or Hyphasis of Greek Accounts)

We hear of nine nations and '5,000 (!) cities' lying between the Jhelum and the Beas. The kingdom of Porus is said to have contained nearly 300 (!) 'cities'. Despite the exaggeration in these figures, urbanism would thus seem to be a very important feature of this region.

Glauganikai (= Glachukāyanaka mentioned in a *Kāshikā* on Pāṇini, IV.3.99). It lay to the west of the Chenab and bordered the dominion of the elder Porus. Urbanism was a factor here too. It had 37 towns, each of which claimed a population between 5,000 and 10,000.

Then there were the Adraistai and the Kathaioi (=Kaṭhas), with their fortified town named Sangala, not satisfactorily located.

(c) *Southern Punjab and Sindh*

The Malloi (Mālavas, right bank of lower Ravi—Irāvatī or 'Hydraotes' of Greek accounts) and Oxydrakai (Kshudrakas, below the confluence of the Jhelum and the Chenab) formed a confederacy. They offered stiff but futile resistance to Alexander who was on his way back after having failed to march beyond the Beas, because of opposition from his soldiers. A similar forcible subjugation awaited the Agalassoi (Ārjunāyanas), who had ventured to fight the invader. However, the Sibae (Shibis, below the junction of Jhelum and Chenab) had already submitted. Abastanoi (Ambashṭhas in the lower Chenab area), the Xathri (Kshatriyas) and the Ossadii (Vasāti) are the other tribes that

figure in the accounts of this campaign. In the southern reaches of the Indus and in Sindh were located the principalities of Musicanus, Oxycanus and Sambus.

Information about the figures of Indian armies is given by Alexander's historians for five states in the area between the Jhelum and the Chenab, and this may be tabulated as follows:

State	*Cavalry*	*Infantry*	*Elephants*	*Chariots*
Assakenoi	20,000	30,000+	30	
Kingdom of Porus	3,000*	50,000+	130	1,000
Agalassoi	3,000*	40,000		
Malloi and Oxydrakoi	10,000	90,000	900	
Abastanoi	6,000	60,000	500	

* The strength of cavalry has been worked out on the basis of two men per horse.

Thus, apart from the state of the Nandas in Magadha, at least five states in the northwestern part of the subcontinent possessed well-organized armies. These could be formed only on the basis of a well-established taxation system. Although only a few sites have been excavated in Pakistan and northwestern India, an incidental mention of 300 cities in one kingdom and of 37 cities in another in the classical accounts suggests solid agricultural support. Pāṇini, held to be native to this region, speaks not only of *kara* in the sense of tax but also of *kṣhetrakāras*, who divided the arable land into plots by survey and fixed their area for tax purposes.

(For details of the campaigns of Alexander and the impact of his invasion on India, see *Mauryan India*, pp. 1–12, in this series).

3.3 *Mahājanapadas* as Socio-Cultural Regions

Mahājanapadas could be seen not only as political units, but also as socio-cultural regions—each a structural entity consisting of such elements as *varṇa* and residential units of *gāma* (village), *nigama* (township) and *nagara* (town). Sometimes a *janapada* denoted an undefined and extensive region. We are thus told of a great caravan of a thousand carts going from the eastern *janapada* into the western *jana-*

pada. On account of regional variations in social habits, the Buddha is said to have relaxed some of the rules which he had established for the monks in the *Majjhima Janapada* (Middle Country). It is also stated that in the Avanti–*Dakkhiṇāpatha* (Malwa and the Deccan) the surface soil was dark, hard, trampled by hoofs of cattle; and so, the Buddha allowed sandals with many linings for monks in this region.

In the *Dakkhiṇa janapada* we are told about a ceremony called *dhovana* observed by feasting, dancing and singing. The Buddha called it quite lowly and not conducive to *nibbāna*. In another instance, the Buddha refers to an ancient custom in a certain *janapada* where people threw dust, cowdung and ashes on newly wed girls without knowing the significance of such actions.

Denying the Brāhmaṇa Assalāyana's claim to superiority based on birth and status, the Buddha tells him how in Yona and Kāmboja and other outlying regions there are just two *varṇas*—the master and slave, and that it was possible there for a master to become a slave and vice versa. Thus Kāmboja, one of the sixteen *mahājanapadas*, was thought to have a different social structure than that of the others, where the caste–*varṇa* system prevailed.

The hostility between the *gaṇas* and the *rājyas*, could also be seen as an engagement of two different types of cultural ethos. As noted above, the earliest record of any attempt at the establishment of a newer type of settlement in the east (concentration point of the *gaṇas*) is found in the *Shatapatha Brāhmaṇa*. The existence of a flourishing indigenous culture in the mid-Ganga basin as early as the second millennium BC is indicated by the excavations at Chirand, which have so far yielded a very advanced neolithic assemblage. In later times, the *gaṇas* inhabiting the region—the Lichchhavis, Mallas, Sākyas, etc.—were regarded as low mixed castes, who did not follow either Brahmanical, or—even more importantly—Vedic rituals. The presence of internal tensions arising from the increasingly inegalitarian nature of the monarchical state posed a contrast to these less differentiated *gaṇas*. The *gaṇas* were ultimately overcome by Magadha in the fifth century BC with the advantage given to it of greater wealth and centralized resources.

3.4 State Formation

When and how did the states come into existence? None of our literary sources until *c.* 500 BC show that either regular taxes or a professional army, the two essential organs of the territorial state, had appeared until that date. The existing archaeological evidence makes it difficult to ascribe the rise of the states in Kosala and Magadha to *c.* 600 BC or earlier. The earliest calibrated radiocarbon dates (for the NBPW phase) provided by M. Stuiver are 400 BC for Ayodhya, 406 BC for Kaushāmbi, 391 BC for Piprahwa and 400 BC for Rajghat. For Manjhi in Saran district (Bihar) the calibrated radiocarbon date is 400 BC. There is no doubt that the NBPW was the most distinctive pottery of the Iron Age society in the Ganga plains. While many samples meant for radiocarbon dating belong to the mid-levels of the NBPW, others from the mid-Ganga sites belong to the early levels. Hence, on the basis of pre-mid-level deposits these dates cannot be pushed much beyond *c.* 550 BC, which may be the starting point for the evolution of the early monarchical state (see *Note 2.1*). Further confirmation for this chronology may be derived from the beginnings of metal money in the Indian subcontinent (see *Notes 1.1* and *3.1*).

There is little doubt that the rise of territorial states in the post-Vedic centuries was made possible by the growth of agriculture. Early states grew largely in the riverine plains. It seems that certain areas, especially suited to the development of agriculture and the consequent economic, social and political processes that it set in motion, became the most successful nursery of powerful states. The process may not have been uniform. The continuation of hunting–gathering peoples on the fringes of settled agrarian communities and of the tension between the two is a recurring motif in Indian history. The Niṣhādas, Shabaras, Kirātas, Bhillas and numerous other such hunting–gathering peoples figure continuously in literature. It looks quite probable that the expansion of agrarian and money economy and its concomitant cultural development may have taken place at the expense of these hunter–gatherers. D.R. Chanana's study of the expansion of agriculture on the basis of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, where the *rākṣhasas* have been interpreted as symbolizing the receding hunting–gathering peoples fighting for the preservation of their way of life, epitomizes such a development. The recruitment of hilly and forest tribes in the army of

Androkottos (Chandragupta Maurya, the founder of the Mauryan empire) mentioned in our Greek sources is, on the other hand, an indication also of the realization of their possible usefulness for the emerging states.

While it may be possible to accept that both the state and urbanism appear around 550 BC, it needs to be underlined that the latter is not a prerequisite for the formation of the early state. In a study of early states spread all over the world, out of as many as 21 early states only 12 show evidence of urbanization. However, the converse view that the state once formed promotes urbanization is plausible. None of the states of north India in our period can be called 'city-states', for this term of ancient Greek origins refers to a city forming an independent state. It may be possible to apply it at the most to a handful of cases, and that too only in the post-Mauryan times, because we then have coins issued by some cities.

On the basis of the study of the 21 early states of the world we have just referred to, Henri J.M. Claessen has spelt out seven traits of the early state: (1) population sufficient to make possible social categorization, social stratification and specialization; (2) its citizenship determined by residence or birth in the territory, which, according to us, means that citizenship is not exclusively defined by membership of a clan or a tribe; (3) the government has centralized control and possesses the necessary power to maintain law and order, through the use of both force and authority; (4) it is independent at least in fact, and the government has sufficient power to prevent separation and the capacity to meet external threats; (5) the population shows enough of stratification which enables one to distinguish between the emergent social classes of the rulers and the ruled; (6) productivity is high enough to ensure regular surplus which is used for the maintenance of the state organization; and (7) the state has a common ideology on which the legitimacy of the ruling stratum is based. It will appear that several of these structural traits including population, territory, differentiation in the population, central control, possession of armed force, and surplus leading to taxes are consistent with the ancient Indian definition embodied in the concept of *saptāṅga rājya*—seven elements of state. On the other hand, the fort (*durga*), high functionaries (*amātyas*) and ally (*mitra*) do not appear in Claessen's traits of the early state. Though there is no place

of ideology in the Indian definition, the aims and ideals to be followed by the king are often stated.

A full-fledged state maintains a taxation system, a professional army, and a cadre of officials. The ancient Indian thinkers regarded territory (*rashtra/janapada*) and the fortified capital (*durga*) as important ingredients of a kingdom; both stress elements of territory and people, which are also regarded as important elements in the modern definition of the state. Another indispensable element in the rise and growth of the state is the emergence of a taxation system. The basic thesis of Kauṭilya, an early theorist of the state, is that the army exists because of the treasure, and that the state's territory, of which the treasure is the ornament, is won by the treasury and the army paid through it. He says that the territory should be populated by members of the lower orders (*avaravarṇaprāya*) who are capable of paying taxes and supplying labour power.

Clearly, a professional army is a crucial attribute of the state: it is central to both the control of territory and accumulation of treasure, which Kauṭilya so emphasizes. It is a matter of speculation whether the increasing importance of horsemen, along with chariots, may not have had a role to play in the emergence of powerful states in our period. Greek accounts of Alexander's campaign in India show, as we have noted above (3.2), that the Indian tribes and kingdoms had substantial numbers of cavalry. Arrian, probably on the authority of Nearchus, states that these horsemen had 'neither saddles or bridles', though iron bits were in use. As Cunningham points out, the Bharhut sculptures (second century BC) show a fairly elaborate bridle or headharness (*Figure 3.1*); and one wonders whether even in pre-Mauryan times the bridle was not coming into use to give the rider greater control over the horse.

The formation of a ruling order with functions of fighting, administering, etc., legally assigned to it on a hereditary basis by the *Dharmasūtras*, is seemingly peculiar to the Indian situation. The *rājanya* of the later Vedic period now came to be replaced by the Kshatriya/Khattiya order in the *Dharmasūtras* and the Pali texts. The Jaina and Buddhist monks, who had no place in the Brahmanical hierarchy, lent greater support to the emergent ruling order, for they accorded the Khattiyas the first place in social ranking and also provided a new

theory ('social contract') of legitimizing their authority (see 3.1 above). However, how voluntary offerings (which people were expected to make to the 'elected' Khattiya under this 'contract') evolved into mandatory payments is not indicated.

FIGURE 3.1 Horseman and horse: Bharhut sculpture (second century BC). Note absence of saddle and stirrup. (Reprod. B. Barua)

Neither the early Pali texts nor the earliest law books, the *Dharmasūtras*, assign to the king the ownership of all the land. Protection was a function inherited by the king from the stage of tribal chieftainship, but now it served as a good reason for validating his authority. Gautama tells us that the rate of *bali* or tax should be 1/6, 1/8 or 1/10 (of the produce). Varying rates might mark the stages in the development of the capacity of the peasants to pay, which in turn would depend on the nature of the soil they cultivated. Apparently, the carrying capacity of the soil to pay as much as 1/6 of the total yield presupposed production of sufficient surplus through cultivation. The term *bhāga* shows that the king was entitled to his share and the term *kara* shows that he could collect taxes from the people. In spite of the exhortation that the king should levy taxes only in accordance with *dhaṁma*, several examples of oppressive taxes appear in the *Jātakas*, which also tell us about the *akāsiyas* and *tuṇḍiyas*, who were oppressive tax collectors.

The fact that in measuring the field the *rajjugāhaka amachcha* was conscious of doing nothing which might cause loss

either to the *rājā* (king) or to the *khettasāmika* (master of the field) or *kuṭumbi* (peasant) shows that land was measured for the purpose of levying rent on it. Pāṇini, who belonged to northwestern India, refers to officers called *kṣhetrakāra*, who divided the cultivable land into plots by measurement and fixed their area, possibly for purposes of taxation. Another statement in Pāṇini has been taken to mean that an impost of two or three *pada* coins was levied on every *hala* or plough measure of land in eastern India. Payment in kind, however, could not be eliminated completely, for we do read about *bali* and *kahāpaṇa* as two separate impositions.

Half a dozen royal collectors, mentioned in the *Jātakas*, held different designations, but they were not placed in charge of different taxes. On the contrary, all of them were connected with the collection of *bali*, which was the chief royal tax. One of these, the *yatta* can be identified with Pāṇini's *āyukta*, which was a general term for government servants engaged in routine work. They seem to be the same as the *niyuktaḥ* mentioned by Gautama. Apart from *kṣhetrakāras*, Pāṇini also mentions officers known as *karakaras*, who were entrusted with the raising of taxes in eastern India. Other tax collectors are called *balisādhakas*, *niggāhakas* and *balipaṭiggāhaka*.

The revenue officers were evidently backed by a number of other officers called *rājabhaṭa* (cf. *Vinaya Piṭaka*, datable to *c.* 300 BC). They performed executive, military and judicial functions. Officials known as *mahāmātras*, different categories of whom were employed by Ashoka, appear in the *Vinaya Piṭaka*. Besides these, *amachchas* also figure in Pali texts and the early law books. They acted as members of the *parisā* or 'council' mentioned in the *Vinaya Piṭaka*. *Amachchas* formed a cadre of officers, who were appointed to different posts with different functions. One *Jātaka* even mentions as many as 80,000 *amachchas*. This number may be a conventional representation for a large number, but we hear of a king who gathered his *amachchas* by beat of drum through the city.

We may not have a clear idea about the precise functions of each of these tax collectors, but we may presume here a fairly organized fiscal system, free from the dominating influence of the kinsmen of the king. It was certainly a significant advance on the *ad hoc*,

irregular, ceremonial collections of later Vedic times when some kinsmen of the chief collected such dues. It is not necessary that every state was equipped with all these officials in our period. But officers connected with the assessment and collection of *bali* may have served in most states.

It is held that the *parisā* or *parishad* was perhaps the most important institution in the non-monarchical *janapadas*. This organ was obviously the same as found in the kingly states of the Upanishads, of which the principal ones were composed not much earlier than the early Pali texts. Although in the time of Ashoka the *parisā* probably consisted of full-time paid officials, yet the *parishad* described in the *Dharmasūtras* consisted only of *vipras* or *Brāhmaṇas*. Whatever their composition, institutions such as *parisā*/*parishad* together with various administrative positions could be maintained only out of the taxes collected by the king.

Much of the money and materials collected in tax and tribute went towards the maintenance of a professional army, the priests, the royal harem and kitchen, the storehouse, the armoury, and artisanal workshops (*karmanta*). Commandeered labour (*vishṭi*) might also have been used, though we cannot say to what extent. Apparently, it was too early to draw a line between state expenditure and the private household expenditure of the king. The non-producing classes, which lived on the social surplus, found it necessary to evolve not only an ideological justification of social stratification, but also a bureaucracy, a professional army and other organs of the state apparatus to perpetuate the established order. It should be obvious that every institution as was not directly engaged in production and did not pay its own way had to be supported by gifts, taxes and tribute.

A good share of the state income went to *bhikkhus* (Jaina and Buddhist) and Brāhmaṇas, who played the roles of priests, renouncers and ideologues. The religious men were supported not only by the state but also by the artisans, peasants, traders and substantial men in society. Yet the fact remained that state patronage was very important both for the growth of the new religious movements and for the maintenance of the old Brahmanical priesthood.

3.5 The Rise of Magadha

The process of 'state formation' thus led to the emergence of monarchies with frameworks (however primitive) of bureaucratic and military administrations. These proved stronger than tribal polities, which the monarchies tended to absorb; and so, large kingdoms were created. In time, the weaker kingdoms fell, in turn, to the onslaughts of the more powerful; and the path was thus cleared for the formation of an empire. Our period was, in fact, not only one of transition from tribal polities to kingdoms, but also one of transition from kingdoms to large territorial states. The latter process is identical with the rise of Magadha.

The political history of India from the late sixth century to the late fourth century BC has to be constructed mainly from the Pali canon, the later Buddhist and Jaina traditions, and the Purāṇas (*Extract 3.2*), supplemented, for the very last phase, from Greek and Latin sources. As one may expect, there are many dark patches and contradictions in our evidence, and sometimes it would appear that one can offer even an outline, only with some diffidence.

During the lifetime of the Buddha (whose death is conventionally assigned to about 484 BC; see *Note 3.1*), the three major powers which find mention in the Pali sources are Avanti, Kosala and Magadha, all of them kingdoms.

Of these the kingdom of **Avanti**, with its capital at Ujjain, is the most dimly noticed. The Purāṇas describe a royal line, whose first king Pradyota was installed after the previous ruler of Avanti had been killed by force. Pradyota made 'neighbouring kings subject to him', and the *Majjhima Nikāya* tells us of his posing a threat to Rājagaha (Rajgir, Bihar), the capital of the Magadha ruler Ajātashatru, a younger contemporary of the Buddha. He also warred against the ruler of Vachchha or Vatsa, with its capital Kaushāmbī (Kosam), near Allahabad.

Kosala (capital: Sāvatthi or Shrāvastī, northeast Uttar Pradesh) had become a powerful state under its ruler Pasenadi or Prasenajit, a friend of the Buddha. The *mahājanapada* of Kāsī had by now been incorporated in Kosala, since the 'village' of Kāsī was given in dowry by Pasenadi to Bimbisāra, the Magadha ruler, upon the latter marrying his daughter; this was to become a disputed issue between

Kosala and Magadha after Bimbisāra's death. The Buddha's own clan of Sākyas was subjugated by Kosala, so that the Buddha was known as a Kosalan. Pasenadi's son and successor, Viḍūḍabha, carried out a great massacre of the Sākyas.

Magadha (capital: Rājagaha or Rajgir, south Bihar), with its troubled relations with both Avanti and Kosala, grew in power gradually. By the time of its ruler Bimbisāra, given a reign of 28 years by the Purāṇas (*c.* 520–*c.* 492 BC), Magadha had annexed the *mahājanapada* of Aṅga (eastern Bihar). Bimbisāra was deposed and killed by his son, Ajātasattu or Ajātashatru (*c.* 492–*c.* 467 BC). Ajātashatru managed to retain the Kāsī 'village' in a war with Kosala, and paying a visit to the Buddha divulged to him his ambition of subjugating the Vajjīs (north Bihar) (see *Figure 3.2*). A fort at Pāṭaligāma (Pāṭaliputra) was established by him in view of the hostilities with the Vajjīs. He was apparently successful in the enterprise after possibly a protracted struggle.

FIGURE 3.2
'Ajātashatru sets out to pay obeisance to the Buddha' (*Ajātasata Bhagavato vandate*): Bharhut sculpture (second century BC) with inscribed label. Note how the king is accompanied by (slave?) women guards. (Reprod. B. Barua)

According to the Purāṇas, Udayin was the ruler of Magadha in the second generation after Ajātashatru, and following the chronology we have provisionally adopted, reigned from *c.* 442 to *c.* 409 BC. He is said to have shifted his capital to 'Kusumapura, on the south bank of the Ganga', i.e. Pāṭaliputra. Buddhist and Jain traditions alike describe Udayin as the son and immediate successor of Ajātashatru.

There is still more confusion in respect of Udayin's successors since the Purāṇas and the Buddhist texts differ very sharply here. While the Purāṇas make Shishunāga the first of the line to which Bimbisāra belonged, the Buddhist texts treat Shishunāga as a later ruler of Magadha. The problem seems insoluble, given the state of evidence.

What is most certain is that by the time the Nandas (*c.* 344–*c.* 322 BC) seized the throne, they were able to rule over Magadha that had by now become an empire. The Purāṇas say of the first Nanda ruler Mahāpadma Nanda, of Shūdra birth, that he would be (for the Purāṇas speak always in the future tense) 'the sole monarch, bringing all under his sway' and would 'uproot all Kshatriyas'. According to the Hathigumpha inscription of Khāravela (late first century BC) the Nanda king (*rājā*) exercised ascendancy over Kaliṅga (Orissa) three hundred years earlier. (Kaliṅga must subsequently have become independent, to require its conquest again by the Mauryan emperor Ashoka in *c.* 262 BC.) Towards the west, the Nandas controlled the upper Ganga basin as well, since Alexander expected on reaching the Beas (in 326 BC) to be opposed in the east by Agrammes (Augrasainiya?), the ruler of the 'Gangaridae' and the 'Prasii' (Prāchyas, 'easterners'), said to possess more elephants than any other ruler in India. It is possible that the Nanda empire spread the Māgadhī dialect (where 'r' was invariably replaced by 'l') as the 'official' language; and in that case areas where the inscriptions of Ashoka (*c.* 270–*c.* 234 BC) carry this dialect, from Haryana and eastern Rajasthan to Orissa, might well have been inherited by the Mauryas from the Nandas. That the roots of the Mauryan empire, covering most of India, lay in the territorial expansion of Magadha is confirmed by the appellation 'Magadhan king' used by Ashoka (*c.* 270–234 BC) for himself in his Bairat rock inscription in eastern Rajasthan.

Extract 3.1

On the Original Social Contract

(From the *Aggañña Sutta, Dīgha Nikāya*)

Thus have I heard. Once the Lord was staying at Sāvatthi . . . and at that time Vāseṭṭha and Bhāradvāja were living among the monks, hoping to become monks themselves.

Then the Lord said to Vāseṭṭha . . . 'there comes a time, when, sooner or later after a long period, this world contracts. . . . But sooner or later, after a very long period, this world begins to expand again. . . . At that period . . . after a very long period of time, savoury earth spread itself over the waters. . . . It looked just like the skin that forms itself over hot milk as it cools. It was endowed with colour, smell and taste. It was the colour of fine ghee or butter, and it was very sweet, like pure wild honey. . . .'

The Lord continued and explained to Vāseṭṭha: 'then some being of a greedy nature said, "I say, what can this be?" and tasted the savoury earth on its fingers. In so doing, it became taken with the flavour, and craving arose in it.... Beings continued for a very long time feasting on this savoury earth, feeding on it and being nourished by it. . . . And because they [the beings] became arrogant and conceited about their good looks, the savoury earth disappeared. [The process went on and on. Fungus (mushroom) and creepers cropped up and disappeared because of people's greed, arrogance and conceit]. . . .'

'And then, after the creepers had disappeared, rice appeared in open spaces, land free from jungles, free from powder and from husks, fragrant and clean grained. And what they had taken in the evening for supper had grown again and was ripe in the morning, and what they had taken in the morning for breakfast was ripe again by evening, with no sign of reaping. And these beings set to and fed on this rice, and this lasted for a very long time. . . .'

'Now it occurred to one of those beings who was inclined to laziness: "well now, why should I be bothered to gather rice in the evening for supper and in the morning for breakfast? Why shouldn't I gather it all at once for both meals?" And he did so. And thus another being went without "rice-gathering" for two days; yet another one for four days, eight days. However, when those beings made a store of rice and lived on that, husk-powder and husk began to envelop the grain, and where it was reaped it did not grow again, and the cut place showed, and the rice grew in separate clusters. . . .'

'And then those beings came together lamenting: "wicked ways have become rife among us. . . . So now let us divide up the rice into fields

with boundaries." So they did so. Then, Vāseṭṭha, one greedy-natured being, while watching over his own plot, took another plot that was not given to him, and enjoyed the fruits of it. So they seized hold of him and said: "You have done a wicked thing, taking another's plot like that! Don't ever do such a thing again!" "I won't", he said, but he did the same thing a second and a third time. . . . And in this way, Vāseṭṭha, taking what was not given, and censuring, and lying, and punishment, took their origin.'

'Then those beings came together and lamented the arising of these evil things among them . . . and they thought: "suppose we were to appoint a certain being who would show anger where anger was due, censure those who deserved it, and banish those who deserved banishment! And in return, we would grant him a share of the rice." So they went to the one among them who was the most handsome, the best-looking, the most pleasant and capable, and asked him to do this for them in return for a share of the rice, and he agreed.'

'"The People's Choice" is the meaning of Mahā-Sammata [name of the first king of the solar race and ancestor, among others, of the Sākyan rulers (and hence of Gotama)], which is the first title to be introduced. "Lord of the Field" is the meaning of Khattiya [associated with *khetta*—'field'], the second such title. And "He Gladdens Others with *Dhamma* (Righteousness)" is the meaning of Rājā, the third title to be introduced. . . .'

[Abridged and adapted from Maurice Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha* (*A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*), Kandy, Sri Lanka, 1995, pp. 407–15.]

Extract 3.2
The Dynastic History of Magadha
(From the Purāṇas)

Shishunāgas

Shishunāga will destroy all their prestige [i.e. of the preceding Prādyota rulers] and will be king. Placing his son in Vārāṇasī he will make Girivraja [Rajgir] his own abode. Shishunāga will reign 40 years. His son Kākavarṇa will obtain the earth 36 years. Kshemadharman will be king next 20 years. Kshatraujas will obtain the earth 40 years. Vimbisāra will be king 28 years. Ajātashatru will be king 25 years. Darshaka will be king 25 years. After him Udayin will be king 33 years. That king will make as his capital on the earth Kusumapura on the south bank of the Ganga in his fourth year. Nandivardhana will be king 40 years. Mahānandin will be 43 years.

These will be the 10 Shishunāga kings. The Shishunāgas will endure 360 [variants, 163 and 362] years, being kings with Kshatriya kinsfolk.

Nandas

A son of Mahānandin by a Shūdra woman will be born a king, Mahāpadma (Nanda), who will exterminate all Kshatriyas. Thereafter kings will be of Shūdra origin. Mahāpadma will be sole monarch, bringing all under his sole sway. He will be 88 [variant, 28] years on the earth. He will uproot all Kshatriyas, being urged on by prospective fortune. He will have 8 sons, of whom Sukalpa will be the first; and they will be kings in succession to Mahāpadma for 12 years.

A Brahman Kauṭilya will uproot them all; and, after they have enjoyed the earth 100 years, it will pass to the Mauryas.

(Translation, slightly modified, by F.E. Pargiter, *The Purāṇa Text of the Dynasties of the Kali Age*, London, 1913.)

Note 3.1

Problems of Chronology

The chronology of the period has long depended on two pillars: the Puranic lists giving reign-periods of rulers of Magadha, preceding the establishment of the Maurya dynasty, and the Buddhist traditions regarding the period of time that had passed between the death of the Buddha and the accession of Ashoka. The two different sources could be reconciled to produce an acceptable, approximate chronology because the Buddhist tradition made the Buddha a contemporary of the Magadha ruler Bimbisāra and his son Ajātashatru (Ajātasattu), both of whom appear on the Puranic lists as well. It may be particularly noted that the contemporaneity of the Buddha with Ajātasata (so spelt) is attested as early as the second century BC by a label for a sculptured scene (*Figure 3.2*) at the Bharhut *stupa*.

The base points from which we begin are the years *c.* 322 BC for the accession of Chandragupta, the founder of the Mauryan Empire, and *c.* 270 BC for the accession of his grandson, Ashoka, on the basis of Ashoka's references to his five contemporary Macedonian rulers in his Rock Edict XIII of *c.* 257 BC. (See *Mauryan India*, *Note 1.1.*, pp. 44–46). According to the Puranic lists, Vimbisāra (Bimbisāra) reigned for 28 years, and Ajātashatru for 25 (variant, 27) years, both belonging to the Shishunāga dynasty. Ajātashatru's four successors reigned for a total period of 141 years, when they were succeeded by the Nandas. Two generations of the Nandas (Mahāpadma and his sons) are assigned a period of a hundred years, with an incredibly long reign-period of 88 years assigned to the first Nanda; a copyists' variant however, would reduce the period to just 40 years. According to the Sri Lankan Buddhist tradition, the Nandas ruled for only 22 years. If we take the shortest period (22 years) assigned to the Nandas, Ajātashatru should have succeeded Bimbisāra in *c.* 510 BC (i.e., 188 years before the accession of Chandragupta Maurya); Gautama Buddha should then, have died after *c.* 510 BC, since he is said to have been consulted by

Ajātashatru after he had become king. The other two longer periods assigned to the Nandas, if accepted, would put back the time of the Buddha and his contemporaries still further.

The Sri Lankan Buddhist tradition, as contained especially in the *Mahāvaṃsa* provides an alternative but largely corroborative chronology, by telling us that Ashoka on becoming a Buddhist had a second coronation four years after his accession, and at this time 218 years had passed since the death of the Buddha. This would mean that Ashoka's accession, *c.* 270 BC, occurred 214 years after the Buddha's death, which accordingly should be placed at *c.* 484 BC. Since the *Mahāvaṃsa* also says that the Buddha died when Ajātashatru had been king for eight years, this would place the latter's accession in 492 BC, rather than 510 BC, as fixed by the use of the rulers' reign-periods.

The difference, then, in the two calculations amounts to about 18 years, for which there could be possible explanations such as errors in one or more of the reign-periods or the period of time elapsing between Ajātashatru's accession and the Buddha's death. It may, therefore, be safe to be conservative here and treat the Buddha's death as taking place in or about 484 BC. Since, according to the Pali canon, the Buddha was a contemporary of Mahāvīra, the great Jain teacher, and was alive when the latter died, Mahāvīra's death ought to be placed at some time earlier, but not, perhaps, too far earlier, than 484 BC.

Two Jaina traditions, indeed, put the death of Mahāvīra around this date. A Shvetāmbara tradition places it 470 years before the epoch of the Vikrama era (58 BC), i.e., in 528 BC; and Hemachandra says it occurred 155 years before Chandragupta's accession, i.e., in *c.* 477 BC. The Digambaras, who reject the early Jaina canon, as conveyed by the Shvetāmbaras, however, give further antiquity to Mahāvīra, by placing his death 605 years before the Vikrama era, i.e., in 663 BC—though the year would be nearly the same (527 BC) if the Digambaras meant the Shaka era (78 AD) and not the Vikrama!

While it would be imprudent to insist on the years of the deaths of the Buddha and Mahāvīra as having been definitely established by these different clues derived from literary sources, these suggest collectively that they lived and preached in the late sixth and early fifth century BC. Nevertheless, Heinz Bechert has recently argued that, by a 'short chronology', the Buddha's death should be placed between 375 and 355 BC. This suggestion is essentially based on the Northern Buddhist tradition that the Buddha passed away only 100 or 110 years before Ashoka's accession (which would yield *c.* 370 or 380 BC).

Support for this view has been sought to be drawn from archaeology, it being stated that there are no archaeological remains attributable to Buddhism before Ashoka's time (third century BC). But this is true equally of Brahmanism; and none can argue that for this reason Brahmanism must be said to have originated no earlier than the fourth century BC!

It is clear that placing the Buddha in the earlier part of the fourth century

BC would impossibly compress the political history of Magadha unless we argue that the Pali canon's references to Bimbisāra and Ajātasattu as contemporaries of the Buddha are to be rejected, for which there is no good enough reason at all. We have already noted that the tradition of the contemporaneity of Ajātasattu with the Buddha is epigraphically attested at Bharhut as early as the second century BC. Erdosy's argument in favour of a late date for the Buddha is that the 'short chronology' for the Buddha offers a 'better fit' with the archaeological record, since the Buddha lived in an urbanized society, using (punch-marked) coins. We have, however, seen that neither ^{14}C dates nor stratigraphy supports so late a date for the appearance of towns as 400 BC (see Chapter 2.3 and *Note 2.1*). As for coinage, numismatic evidence itself strongly favours the appearance of punch-marked coinage at a date before 500 BC, rather than 400 BC, the date proposed by J. Cribb (see *Note 1.1*).

There is, finally, a statement in the Greek historian Herodotus' celebrated *Histories*, which closed before 430 BC, that we have to consider. Herodotus received a report that there were in India people who 'neither kill anything that has life, nor sow anything, nor are they wont to have houses, but they live upon herbs [and wild grains]. . . . When any of them falls ill, he goes and lies down in the desert [to die].' This is obviously a reference to the 'renouncers' of the new religions, the statement suiting Mahāvīra's followers and Ājīvikas better than the Buddhists. This strongly implies, though does not conclusively prove, that Mahāvīra (and, therefore, his contemporaries, the Buddha and the Ājīvika Gosāla) lived well before 430 BC. The 'long' chronology, with the Buddha's death placed in 484 BC and Mahāvira still earlier, therefore, fits well with this report, while with the 'short' chronology (the Buddha's death in say, *c.* 370 BC) we will have to assume that well before the time of Māhāvīra beliefs akin to his had become quite widespread—possible, certainly, but rather unlikely.

Note 3.2

Bibliographical Note

Hemchandra Raychaudhuri's *Political History of Ancient India from the Accession of Parikshit to the Extinction of the Gupta Dynasty* has been the standard work in the field, ever since its first edition was published in 1923. Its usefulness has been enhanced in its eighth edition, by the commentary of B.N. Mukherjee, New Delhi, 1997. This may be supplemented by Kumkum Roy, *The Emergence of Monarchy in North India: Eighth to Fourth Centuries BC, as Reflected in the Brahmanical Tradition*, New Delhi, 1994.

The two trend-setting monographs of D.D. Kosambi, viz. *The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, London, 1965 (Chapters 5 and 6), and *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, Bombay, revised second edition, 1975 (Chapter 6) [first edition, 1956] as well as an early article, 'Ancient Kosala' (1951–52) (reprinted in *Combined Methods in Indology and Other Writings of D.D. Kosambi*, Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, ed., Delhi, 2002, pp. 21–259), provide valuable

insights on the polities of the period and the socio-cultural profiles of the *mahājanapadas*.

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The writings of Ram Sharan Sharma, notably *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, third edition, Delhi, 1991; *The State and Varṇa Formation in the Mid-Ganga Plains: An Ethnoarchaeological View*, New Delhi, 1996, and 'Taxation and State Formation in Northern India in Pre-Mauryan Times', *Social Science Probings*, Vol. I, No.1, March 1984, pp. 1–32, are all insightful and illuminating.

Sibesh Bhattacharya, *Secular and Pluralistic Elements in the Idea of State in Early India*, Shimla, 2003, is a welcome new study which throws light on the processes of acculturation in the making of the state in ancient India.

On the issues of chronology, taken up in *Note 3.1*, especially the dates of the Buddha and contemporary rulers, see H. Bechert, ed., *When did the Buddha Live?*, Delhi, 1995.

4
The Religious Revolution

4.1 The Intellectual Ferment

The genesis of philosophical speculation goes back to the last book of the *Rigveda*. The questing spirit of the 'Hymn of Creation' (see *The Vedic Age*, *Extract 1.3*, p. 30) never disappeared. People did not hesitate to show their reservations even against Indra, who was otherwise a dominant deity of the *Rigveda*. Doubts also begat enquiry. The early Upanishads and early texts of Buddhism and the Jaina system show that scepticism and doubt in inherited beliefs were becoming fairly widespread.

Indeed, prior to and during the Buddha's lifetime, there already existed a considerable variety of assertions and theories on the origins of the universe, the nature of the soul, and related problems. One of the classic expositions of these multifarious views is found in the Buddha's categorization under four pairs of extremes, each comprising a thesis and an antithesis, whose resolution he endeavoured to achieve by his system of the Middle Path and analytical method of enquiry (*vibhajjavāda*). The four pairs of extremes are:

I: (a) Eternalist thesis: everything exists.
   (b) Annihilationist antithesis: nothing exists.

II: (a) Determinist thesis: everything is predetermined.
   (b) Fortuitist antithesis: nothing is caused and conditioned.

III: (a) Individualist thesis: weal and woe are caused by the moral agent of one's own act.
   (b) Fatalist antithesis: weal and woe are caused by agents other than self.

IV: (a) Hedonist and Utilitarian thesis: adherence to pleasures of the senses constitutes the path to the goal.

(b) Ascetic antithesis: self-mortification constitutes the path to final release.

Ranging between the two extremes in each of these four pairs lay the thought of some centuries.

The plethora of speculations is indicated by general observations in Buddhist and Jaina writings that there were 363 points of view, some of which were characterized as 'wrong' (obviously from the Buddhist and Jaina standpoints). Other views took stock of fate (*niyati*), time (*kāla*), nature (*svabhāva*) or chance (*saṃgati*). References, in general, are made to monists, pluralists, cosmogonists, sensualists, materialists, agnostics, existentialists, annihilationists, eternalists, etc. Amongst those teachers who figure more prominently and by name in Pali texts are: Pūraṇa Kassapa, Pakudha Kachchāyana, Makkhali Gosāla, Ajita Keshakambalin, Sañjaya Belaṭṭhiputta, Niganṭha Nayaputta (Nāthaputta)—the last one being Mahāvīra, the twenty-fourth *tīrthaṃkara* of the Jainas.

Among the more 'orthodox' teachings we find creation ascribed to the self-consciousness of the primeval person (*Puruṣha*, i.e., Prajāpati), who felt fear, loneliness, and the need of companionship. Puruṣha divided himself, and produced a wife. The couple, taking the forms of animals and human beings, created the whole universe. The idea of creation by a cosmic sexual act was one which played a great part in later religious thought. The theme is repeated in various forms in later Vedic literature, in some of which *tapas*—the power derived from asceticism—is an essential feature in the process of creation—a significant shifting of emphasis from the older theory that the world depended on a primeval sacrifice.

Other more 'heterodox' thinkers put forward naturalistic and atheistic cosmogonic theories. Some believed that the world began as water; others postulated fire, wind, or ether (*ākāsha*) as the ultimate basis of the universe. It was recognized that the air was not of infinite extension, though the human mind found it hard to conceive of empty space. The five elements were thought of as the mediums of sense impressions—earth of smell, air of feeling, fire of vision, water of taste, and ether of sound. Some suggested that the world developed not by the intervention of gods or forces external to it, but by a process of internal evolution or 'ripening' (*pariṇāma*). Some, like the Buddha, taught that

speculation on first causes was futile, while others proclaimed that the world was made of eternal atoms.

Before we proceed further it seems best to express some reservation about nomenclature of 'heterodox sects' that is usually applied to non-Brahmanical religious currents of thought. Brahmanical traditions of enumerating Indian religious and philosophic traditions tend to classify them into two streams, viz., *āstika* and *nāstika*, which are often rather inaccurately translated as 'theistic' and 'atheistic'. The Buddha, Mahāvīra and several other thinkers have been put under the latter category. The criteria for doing so has not been their position on the question of the existence of God as the Creator, as one would normally expect, given the modern dictionary meanings of 'theism' and 'atheism'. Instead, a thinker or a system would be classified on the basis of whether the Vedas were accepted as the sole and definitive authority of faith and ritual—acceptance of that authority would accord the teacher or system a place amongst the *āstikas* and a rejection, to the category of *nāstikas*. Thus, the Sāṃkhya and the Vedānta, the two major schools out of the six schools of philosophy (*shaḍ-darshanas*), are classed as *nāstika* and *āstika*, respectively.

Two other allied issues in this problem of nomenclature 'heterodox sects' are: (a) an element of contempt towards *nāstikas*, and (b) an *a priori* assumption that the Vedic tradition constitutes *the mainstream tradition*. The twofold classification of Indian religious–philosophic traditions is not merely a classificatory formulation. Ingrained in it is the message of inferiority of the non-Vedic streams. That this dismissive attitude towards the latter continued for a very long period may be seen in the classic example of a fourteenth-century compendium of Indian philosophies, viz. the *Sarva-darshana-saṃgraha*. Written by Mādhvācharya, the pontiff of Shaṃkarāchārya's *maṭha* at Shriṅgerī, it enumerates as many as 16 religious and philosophic systems. All these systems have been graded from the worst to the best—the sole criterion being their proximity or otherwise to the Vedāntā of Shaṃkarāchārya. No wonder, the Vedāntā is declared to be the best and the highest, while the Chārvaka system is characterized as the most removed from it and, therefore, the worst. Dubbing non-Vedic systems as 'heterodox' is thus not an exact rendering of the term *nāstika*. It is more a projection of the Brahmanical standpoint which many nineteenth-century Orientalists

tended to accept as constituting the mainstream, so that all those who deviated from it were 'heterodox'. Further, by designating them as mere 'sects', they were being denied the status of independent systems. Though the Buddha and Mahāvīra sometimes called their opponents propagators of 'wrong views', there was no attempt made to denigrate them or use pejorative terms for them or to treat them as of inferior status. We need, therefore, to avoid the terms 'orthodox' and 'heterodox', even though the latter nowadays evokes not scorn but sympathy. Buddhism and Jainism and even the extinct Ājīvikas must be seen as representing alternative systems which in course of time contributed immensely to the enrichment of Indian thought and culture.

The propagators of the alternative doctrines, including those upholding materialism and scepticism, were nearly all ascetics, though the literature of the time mentions more than one king who took a keen interest in the new ideas. The Buddha and Mahāvīra, though they joined the ranks of ascetics, were exceptions in so far as they belonged to ruling families. Largely, all the major leading lights of this intellectual ferment shared a common trait, viz. a strong anti-Vedic stance.

4.2 Ājīvikas

This ascetic order of considerable standing lasted for at least 300 years, for, not only emperor Ashoka, but also his grandson, Dasharatha (*c.* 210 BC) gave the Ājīvikas some cave-dwellings (near Gaya in Bihar), and Patañjali's commentary (*c.* 150 BC) on the great treatise of Pāṇini on grammar (*Aṣṭādhyāyī*) seems to take cognizance of the order. In the fourteenth century, Mādhva the author of *Sarva-darshana-saṃgraha* dealt with teachings of the Ājīvikas, largely to underline its distance from the Vedānta. Our entire understanding about the Ājīvikas is based necessarily on notices of them in the texts of their Buddhist and Jaina detractors and adversaries, for none of their own texts have survived. This means that our knowledge of their views and philosophy must necessarily rest on reports or traditions hostile, or at the very least, unsympathetic to them.

Pūraṇa Kassapa, Pakudha Kachchāyana and Maṅkhaliputta (Makkhali) Gosāla (or Maskarin Goshāla) appear to have been the leading spirits of this religious order, which seems to have flourished in and around Sāvatthi, the capital of the kingdom of Kosala.

According to a tradition recorded by Buddhaghosa (fifth century AD), the renowned commentator of Pali texts, Gosāla means one who was born in a cow-shed and Makkhali means one who stumbled in mud. He also tells us that during his early years Gosāla was employed as a servant, who, while carrying an oil-pot stumbled on account of carelessness, and from the fear of his employer, fled away naked. Pāṇini thought that the true form of Makkhali was Maskarin, i.e., one who carried a bamboo staff. But Patañjali took Makkhali to mean a member of a school of wanderers who believed in passivity and quietude. A passage in the *Dīgha Nikāya* emphasizes the Ājīvika sense of self-respect, conscientiousness, continence, and very tender regard for animals and all forms of life. Thus, we learn that an Ājīvika never incurred the guilt of obeying another man's command; refused to accept food which was specially prepared for him; did not accept food from people when they were eating, lest they should run short of it; did not accept food collected in time of drought; did not accept food where a dog was standing by or flies were swarming around, lest they should lose a meal; and did not eat fish or meat, nor take intoxicants.

The Buddha regarded the fatalistic ideas of Gosāla as the least desirable. In his opinion the Doctrine of Fate, like the Doctrines of Chance, Providence, etc., does not afford rational ground upon which to base a moral philosophy. According to Buddhaghosa, Pūraṇa Kassapa denied action through his theory of the passivity of soul, and Ajita Keshakambalin eliminated the scope of retribution through his annihilationism, and, finally, Gosāla by his theory of determinism denied both action and results.

The Dravidian Ājīvikas (often located south of the Godavari river) developed their doctrines in a way resembling Mahāyāna Buddhism of the early centuries AD. Gosāla became an ineffable divinity, while the doctrine of destiny evolved into the view that all change and movement are illusory.

Later Jaina tradition suggests that the Ājīvika canon consisted of eight *mahānimittas* and two *mārgas* which were alleged to have been partially based upon the *pūrvas* coming down from the time of Pārshva, the illustrious predecessor of Mahāvīra. These texts, as we have already noted, have not survived.

4.3 The Jaina System

Mahāvīra was *not* the founder of the Jaina religious system. By tradition, he was the twenty-fourth and the last *tīrthaṃkara* ('Ford Maker') of the Jaina faith. Two of the twenty-four *tīrthaṃkaras* were named Rishbhanātha and Arishṭanemi. These names figure in the *Rigveda*, but the establishment of their identities is problematic. The historicity of Pārshvanātha, the twenty-third *tīrthaṃkara* seems probable, though no such probability attaches to his traditional date, some 250 years before Mahāvīra. The religious order founded by him enjoyed the reputation of a high and rigid standard of ascetic conduct.

While the *Kalpasūtra* does not formally link Pārshva to Mahāvīra, though placing his biography after him, among the *tīrthaṃkara*, a passing remark in the second chapter of the *Āyāraṅga*, i.e., not in the earliest stratum of the biography, that Mahāvīra's parents were the followers of Pārshva and lay devotees of Jaina ascetics, has led to the conclusion that Mahāvīra must have belonged to Pārshva's ascetic lineage. The question of the relationship between the two *tīrthaṃkaras* hinges on the fact that Jaina tradition holds Pārshva and his ascetic community to have followed the path of Fourfold Restraint (*chaujjāma*). A definition of what this might be does not occur until about the second or third century AD when the *Ṭhāṇāṇga*, one of the encyclopaedic texts of the Shvetāmbara canon, states that *chaujjāma* comprised: *ahiṃsā*, *satya*, *asteya* and *bahiddhādāṇāo veramaṇi*. The first three respectively mean abstinence from killing, speaking truth, and abstinence from stealing. The fourth broadly meant non-attachment but it is not clear if it meant celibacy (*brahmacharya*) or non-possession (*apariggaha*).

Mahāvīra seems to have eliminated this ambiguity and converted the *chaujjāma* into the *pañcha-mahāvayyas* ('Five Great Vows', viz., *ahiṃsā*, *satya*, *asteya*, *brahmacharya* and *apariggaha*.). These 'Five Great Vows' are not seriously dealt with in the earliest stratum of Mahāvīra's biography, which mentions Pārshva's Fourfold Restraint along with the avoidance of sexual relations (*brahmacharya*). Yet, the Buddhist Pali canon, albeit not an infallible guide to early Jaina views, consistently identifies Niganṭha Nayaputta, i.e., Mahāvīra, with the preaching of a 'Fourfold Restraint' alone.

Mahāvīra's childhood name was Vardhamāna. He was the son

of Siddhārtha, a chief of the clan of Jñātrikas, i.e., associates of the Lichchhavis of Vaishali (Bihar). His mother Trishalā was the sister of the Lichchhavi chief Chetaka. Legends about Mahāvīra's birth are concerned with the so-called transfer of Mahāvīra's embryo from the womb of a Brāhmaṇa woman called Devanandā to that of Trishalā, along with a reverse transfer of the embryo which was already in Trishalā's womb. This would appear to represent an attempt to give Mahāvīra both a Kshatriya and a Brāhmaṇa lineage, he having been born in the Kshatriya *varṇa* in which all the *tīrthaṃkaras* are said to have been born.

As a prince, Vardhamāna remained inquisitive and left home at the age of 30—leaving his wife and daughter behind him. He moved with the ascetic group called *nirgranthas* ('Free from Bonds') which had probably been established by Pārshva. His wanderings lasted for 12 years during which he also spent some years with Makkhali Gosāla. Doctrinal difference between the two led to their separation. In the thirteenth year Vardhamāna became *Jina* (the conqueror). He soon gained a great reputation and a large band of followers. For 30 years he taught and journeyed, receiving patronage from the same kings as were also lending a sympathetic ear to the Buddha. He survived the death of Gosāla and starved himself to death at the age of 72 in the town of Pāvā near the Magadhan capital Rājagaha (Rajgir). According to the Pali canon, the news of his death was carried to the Buddha. He probably died around 500 BC, though a date later by a century is now being suggested.

The Jaina system comprises three jewels (*triratnas*): Right Knowledge, Right Philosophy and Right Conduct.

The universe is held to be eternal and to function through the interaction of living souls (*jīvas*, literally 'lives') and five categories of non-living entities (*a-jīvas*), i.e., *ākāsha*, *dharma* (means or conditions of movement, as water permits fish to swim), *adharma* (means or conditions of rest—a tertiary space which permits rest), *kāla* (time) and *puggala* (matter). There are an infinite number of souls in the universe—in animal and plant life, in inanimate objects like stones, rocks, in water and in many other natural objects. The interaction of *jīvas* and *a-jīvas* sets off the process of *karma* that generates and shapes the transmigration of souls. The Jainas were rigorous *kiriyavādins*,

believing in the efficacy of the individual's actions. Action is to be guided by the notion of Right Conduct comprising the Five Great Vows mentioned above, the performance of which is aimed at avoiding the four darts (*kāshāyas*), viz., anger, pride, deceit and greed. The annihilation of the karmic process called *nirjarā* comes about through self-mortification and penance. The Jaina view of *nirvāṇa* is closer to that of *mokṣha* of the Upanishads than to the Buddhist conception of *nibbāna* (Pali for *nirvāṇa*), notwithstanding the use of the same word.

Mahāvīra's system is fundamentally atheistic, in that, while not denying the existence of gods, it denies them any important part in the universal scheme. The world, for the Jaina, is not created, maintained or destroyed by a personal deity or an abstract Brahman as was taught by the Upanishads. However, one of the most common terms used in the Jaina system to describe the self in its purest, unconditioned and *karma*-free state, as the sole object of contemplation, is *paramātman*, the 'supreme soul', often referred to as 'god', which exists in potential state within all beings. This could be theism of a sort.

The Jaina view of Reality, with its focus on relativity, constitutes a major contribution to Indian logic and the theory of epistemology. That the truth has numberless facets is the crux of this system. It can be described as a positive and creative *ahiṃsā* (non-violence), rather than a mere extension or sophistication of agnosticism of the Sañjaya Belaṭṭhiputta. Briefly, through its *nayas* (theory of standpoints) and *saptabhaṅgas* (sevenfold predication), the Jaina system explicitly rejected what in classical logic is called the law of the excluded middle. For the Jainas, there were not merely the two possibilities of existence and non-existence, but also that of indescribability. An interplay of the three—their predications in terms of exclusivity or simultaneity—could permit a number of different possibilities. One's view of Reality would depend on the space, time and nature of predications.

Syādvāda, the 'doctrine of may-be', in its classical form delineated seven possible judgements which could be predicated of an entity, involving positive and negative attribution, an acknowledgement of its possible inexpressible nature, and a combination of these, so that, to take the seventh type of predication, it might under certain circumstances be said of that entity that it simultaneously existed, did

not exist and was inexpressible. For Jaina philosophers, this was not a form of scepticism, but merely an acknowledgement that linguistic expressions relating to the world ought to be structured with appropriate awareness of the nature of the reality being described.

The force of the Jaina intellectual argument is that most other religious and philosophic systems claiming to interpret reality, while genuinely containing partial versions of the truth, cannot do full justice to the manifold nature of the world in which we live and that judgements about that world must necessarily vary according to the observer's perspective. As a result of this insight and their strong commitment to non-violence, the Jainas could develop an ethics of peaceable conduct and tolerance. This Jaina view of Reality was at the same time a disguised protest against the dogmatism of Vedism and a strong rebuttal of the authority of the Vedas.

The Jainas had no special social doctrines. The domestic rites of the layman, such as birth, marriage and death, were those of the Vedic tradition. At one time the Jainas maintained a cult of the *stūpa* (*tumulus*) in the same way as the Buddhists, but this has not survived, and in the early centuries AD the *tīrthaṃkaras* began to be adored in temples in the form of icons. Though there was no real compromise with theism, in practice the community easily fitted into the Brahmanic order, its members forming distinct castes.

Shvetāmbaras and Digambaras

There are two major sects of the Jainas: Shvetāmbaras ('the white-robed ones') and Digambaras ('sky-robed ones'). Shvetāmbara monks and nuns wear white robes (an upper and lower garment) and they use a bowl into which alms are deposited and from which they eat. They believe that women can attain spiritual deliverance, and that the *kevalin*, the fully omniscient being, needs to take food. Digambara monks, on the other hand, wear no clothes at all (this does not apply to Digambara nuns) and do not use alms bowls, eating their food from cupped hands. They reject the authority of the Shvetāmbara scriptures, as well as the possibility of deliverance for women and the *kevalin's* need for food.

An examination of early Shvetāmbara literature would seem to leave little room for doubt that Mahāvīra and his male followers went

naked. The *Uttarajjhayana* points to the fact that nudity distinguished Mahāvīra's monks from those of Pārshva, while the *Āyāraṅga* claims that lack of clothing was in full conformity with Jaina doctrines.

FIGURE 4.1 Broken image of a *Tīrthaṃkara* from Lohanipur, Patna, with Mauryan polish (probably third or second century BC). Patna Museum.

Sculptural evidence suggests that there was a gradual movement among Jaina monks towards a differentiation based on apparel or lack of it, rather than any abrupt doctrinal split. The earliest known Jaina image of a *tīrthaṁkara* from Patna (third or second century BC) shows him naked (*Figure 4.1*). All the earliest Jaina images from Mathura, mostly of the first three centuries AD, also display naked human forms, and it is not until the fifth century that there is found an image of Rishabha wearing a lower garment. The practice of images being portrayed as clothed became prevalent even among Shvetāmbaras several centuries later. We have an inscription commemorating a land grant to Jaina sects by a late fifth-century king from south India, which refers to the Shvetāmbaras but uses the old expression *nirgrantha* ('bondless') which was applied to naked monks.

Community of Renouncers

While the most ancient ideal of the Jaina system, as represented in Mahāvīra's early ascetic career, was isolation and solitude, *pabbajjā* ('going forth' from home) did not mean entry into an anarchic world. Instead, it entailed joining a new form of society with its own norms of conduct of daily life and developing new interpersonal relationships. One of the most frequently used terms up to about the tenth century to describe a Shvetāmbara monastic group was *kula* ('family').

Further terms employed, both by the Buddhists and the Jainas, to describe groups of ascetics are *gaṇa* ('troop') and *saṃgha* ('assembly'). These were used in some Vedic texts to refer to young men's bands which were a feature of tribal life. The stress found in the old codes of monastic law on requirement of youth and physical fitness for Jaina and Buddhist monks may point to a degree of continuity with these earlier types of bands of warriors. It is noteworthy that both Mahāvīra and the Buddha were members of the warrior (Kshatriya) *varṇa*.

Jaina Āgamas

The Jaina canonical writings have a generic term *āgama*, which, incidentally, came to acquire a more cross-sectarian connotation. Thus, we have Shaiva *āgamas*, Vaishṇava *āgamas* and Tantra *āgamas*. The word *āgama* occurs in, and for, the Pali canon as well. Literally, it should be understood as the 'coming' of a body of doctrines transmitted through a lineage of authoritative teachers. The followers of the Digambara sect of the Jainas are familiar with 'twelve-limbed basket of the disciples', reminding us of the Theravāda Buddhists' scriptural enumeration in the form of *Tipiṭaka* ('Three Baskets', see below, 4.4, under 'The Pali Canon'). However, unlike the Shvetāmbaras, the Digambaras believe that the *āgamas* have been lost for ever. For them, *āgama* is something like a metaphorical expression. By and large, for most of the Jainas, their scriptures constitute the literal words of Mahāvīra and the other 23 *tīrthaṃkaras* (literally, 'ford-makers'), who preceded him. This is as difficult to prove as, indeed, is the belief of the followers of the Buddha that the *Tipiṭakas* contain the actual utterances of the Master. The notion of a totally fixed canon of 'sacred writings' would be difficult to locate within the Jaina āgamic traditions. Ardhamāgadhī (a form of Prakrit, probably some kind of regional dialect), with its inherent quality of getting automatically transformed into languages of the listeners, is supposedly the sacred language of these traditions, at least according to the Shvetāmbaras. For the Digambaras, *divyadhvani* (the 'divine sound') emanating from the mouth of the *tīrthaṃkara* has to be interpreted by his disciple. Both these positions obviously provide space for considerable flexibility at the local or popular levels. Such an attitude stands in obvious contrast to the

authoritarian status ascribed to Sanskrit, the language of the priests and the ruling elite.

Notwithstanding the different positions of the Digambaras and the Shvetāmbaras about the validity of the āgamic traditions, both show remarkable unanimity in recognizing the disappearance of a large body of scriptural material known as the *pūrva* ('previous', 'ancient') texts. Each *tīrthaṃkara* is supposed to have first preached fourteen of these *pūrvas* before communicating other *āgamas*. These 14 *pūrvas* themselves presuppose the existence of an earlier 10 embodying the religious tradition of Pārshva, that formed a common basis of the Jaina and Ājīvika canon.

TABLE 4.1 *Āgama*

A	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*
12 *Aṅgas*	12 *Upāṅgas*	6 *Cheyasuttas*	4 *Mūlasuttas*	10 *Paiṇṇas*
1) Āyāraṅga	*1) Ovavaiya*	*1) Āyaradasāo*	*1) Uttarājjhayaṇa*	*1) Chausaraṇa*
2) Sūyagaḍaṅga	*2) Rāyapaseṇiya*	*2) Kappasutta*	*2) Dasaveyāliya*	*2) Aturapratyā-khyāna*
3) Ṭhāṇāṅga	*3) Jīvājivabhigama*	*3) Vavahāra*	*3) Avassaya*	*3) Bhaṭṭapariṇṇa*
4) Samavāyāṅga	*4) Paṇṇavanā*	*4) Nisīha*	*4) Ogha- and Piṇḍaniryukti*	*4) Saṃthāra*
5) Bhagavatī-viyāhapaṇṇatti	*5) Sūrapaṇṇatti*	*5) Mahānisīha*		*5) Taṃḍulave-yāliya*
6) Nāyādhamma-kahāo	*6) Jambuddīva-paṇṇatti*	*6) Pañcha-kalpa*		*6) Chaṃdavi-jjhāya*
7) Uvāsagadasāo	*7) Chandapaṇṇatti*			*7) Devimdāṭṭha*
8) Antagaḍadasāo	*8) Nirayāvaliya*			*8) Gaṇivijjā*
9) Anuttarova-vaiyadasāo	*9) Kappavaḍam-siāo*			*9) Mahāpach-chakkhāna*
10) Paṇhavagara-naim	*10) Pupphiāo*			*10) Viraṭṭha*
11) Vivāgasūyam	*11) Pupphaculiāo*			
12) Diṭṭhivaya	*12) Vanhidasāo*			

Note: Contrary to the more popular Sanskritized forms, the names of texts have been given here in their original Ardhamāgadhī forms.

In addition to the 43 *āgamas* (the twelfth *aṅga*, *Diṭṭhivaya*, is supposed to have been lost at an early date) that are listed in *Table 4.1*,

and classified into five groups, there are two independent texts dealing with hermeneutics, viz., the *Nandisutta* (perhaps composed around the beginning of the fifth century AD) and the *Anuogadāra*. Thus, the conventional Shvetāmbara reckoning of āgamic texts accounts for 45 texts.

We have very imperfect knowledge of the canonical text of the Digambaras. The important text called *Shaṭakhaṇḍāgama* ('Scripture of Six Parts') provides the only clue to the existence of such a canon. Traditionally, it is believed to have been based on the oral teachings of a monk named Dharasena (approximately mid-second century AD), who had summoned two other monks, Pushpadanta and Bhūtabali to Mount Girnar (Gujarat) and communicated to them whatever he remembered out of the originally vast extent of the sacred writings. Scholars believe that it is a later representation of the subject-matter of the *Diṭṭhivaya*. One may, therefore, postulate the existence of an original and ancient shared Jaina textual tradition which was bifurcated only gradually. Incidentally, the Mathura inscriptions of the reign of Kaṇishka (first or second century AD) clearly show the existence of a distinct Jaina community whose organizational aspects can be matched in the canon.

The texts now included in the Shvetāmbara Jaina canon contain evidence of literary, religious and philosophic development of more than a millennium. Of the twelve *aṅgas*, Jaina philosophy is dealt with in A-1 and A-10 in *Table 4.1*. A section of the former also gives a biography of Mahāvīra. Doctrinal and other matters are discussed in A-2. A-3 enlightens us on varieties of points of view that may have been contemporaneous with Mahāvīra. These include Ājīvika *Mahānimittas*, and ideas of monism, pluralism, eternalism, materialism, etc. A-5, the largest text of the canon, throws light on Mahāvīra's close relations with Maṅkhaliputta Gosāla and their final separation. A-6 is a series of narratives, only vaguely Jaina in theme, which yield morals about following the religious path. The eighth chapter of this *aṅga* gives the story of Malli, the nineteenth *tīrthaṃkara*. The Shvetāmbaras claim that this *Jina* was a woman who, in a previous birth as a king, had in an excess of spiritual zeal reneged on an agreement about the practice of austerities made with some fellow kings. Having secretly exceeded the limit set and thus generated a degree of negative *karma* by this act of 'deception', he was reborn as a

tīrthaṃkara with a woman's body. The Digambaras reject any possibility of any *tīrthaṃkara* being a woman, for, they believed that women are incapable of obtaining *mokṣha*, because they cannot move about naked or practice the highest type of penance—the *Jina-kalpa*. The Digambaras worship Malli as Mallinātha. The history of the Jaina church, with lists of heads of *Ayyikas* (nuns) of various *tīrthaṃkaras*, carefully maintained by both the sects, and the figures of monks and nuns on the pedestals of *tīrthaṃkaras*' figures of the Kushāṇa period from Kankali-tila (Mathura) suggest that at the beginning there was possibly no such bar against women, the discarding of garments being optional even for the monks. The ways in which the good and bad deeds done in previous births have their respective influences, are dealt with in A-11.

The twelve *upāṅgas* (Category B in *Table 4.1*), too, deal with various subjects ranging from Jaina philosophy and theology to astronomy, geography, cosmology and biography. B-1 gives an account of various attainments and penances of the Jaina saints. B-2 is known for its literary qualities as well as its exposition of the intricacies of the identity of soul and body through the dialogue between Pāesi (King Pasenadi of the Buddhist Pali texts) and the monk Kesi (a follower of Pārshva).

Of the *Cheyasuttas*, C-1 contains the *Kalpasutta* (not to be confused with the *Kappasutta* of the same group, which is a short text on monastic law), which gives us the biography of Mahāvīra and other *tīrthaṃkaras*. This text gave rise to far more manuscripts than any other Jaina work. To the Shvetāmbaras, its particular importance also derives from its connection with the festival of *Paryūṣhaṇa* ('Abiding'), a sort of purificatory or confessional ritual celebrated over a period of eight days in September. C-4 and C-5 serve as guides to Jaina monks and nuns as they contain rules governing their lives and provide indicators of relationship between the preceptor and his disciples. The orthodox elements within the Shvetāmbara tradition, viz. the aniconic streams represented by the Sthānakavāsis and the Terāpanthis, have strong reservations about the antiquity and authenticity of C-5. The fact that it is written in Maharashtri Prakrit, a dialect of western India rather than the Ardhamāgadhī, and that it also alludes to goddesses and magic spells, not found elsewhere in the canon, are taken as indicators of its lateness.

The *Mūlasuttas* are so called because they have to be mastered at the beginning of an ascetic's career. Of these, D-1 is a collection of 36 chapters, nearly all in verse, some very old, dealing with legend, practice and doctrine. The authorship of D-3 is ascribed to Shayyambhava who intended it to be a summary of the scriptures for the benefit of his son. D-4, conventionally ascribed to Bhadrabāhu, deals with components of pious life and subjects of discipline, including care of monastic equipment such as the alms bowl.

There is no firm canonical list of the *Paiṇṇas* (miscellany)—the oldest citation of them in the *Nandisutta* merely suggests that they are outside the *aṅga* texts. It appears that perhaps this was a group, which included such short texts of varying contents as had attained some degree of authority. E-1 is relatively more important amongst the ten texts of the fifth group. Its authorship is ascribed to Vīrabhadda and it contains 63 verses in Prakrit dealing with six essential daily duties and four *saraṇas* (refuges).

When were the *āgamas* committed to writing? This is a rather difficult question to answer. Comparatively speaking, our knowledge about similar questions in respect of the Pali Buddhist canon (see below) is on firmer ground. None of the existing manuscripts of the āgamic texts can be dated before the eleventh century AD. Like the *saṅgītis* of the Buddhists, the Jaina tradition, too, speaks of *vachanas*, usually rendered as councils, but which, in fact, may have been congregations at which scriptural recensions were recited. Three such *vachanas* figure in the Shvetāmbara accounts. All the three are described as taking place after twelve-year famines—perhaps a metaphor for some cycles of political turmoil (the word *durbhikṣha* literally means 'a time when it is difficult to gain alms'). The first recitation is supposed to have been held at Pāṭaliputra 160 years after Mahāvīra's death. This resulted in the formation of the first principal grouping of the canon, viz. the 12 *aṅgas*. The second recitation was held simultaneously at two places 827 years after the death of Mahāvīra. The venues were Mathura in the north and Valabhī (Gujarat) in the west, and these congregations were held under the charge of Skaṇḍila and Nāgārjuna, respectively. There is little evidence of coordination between the two, but the prevailing subsequent perception was that Skaṇḍila presented the 'official' version of scriptures since all the

medieval commentators cite Nāgārjuna's versions as variants. The venues are perhaps also reflective of the shifting foci of Jaina influence, from the east to western India.

The problem of dating specific texts of the *Āgama* corpus is complex. We can only establish a relative chronology for them on the basis of language, metre and evidence of style. While parts of the first two texts of the *aṅga* category are considered to be the oldest in the whole canon and are ascribed to the fifth or fourth centuries BC there are sections within these that cannot be so old. Thus, the second book of the *Āyāraṅga* is perhaps not earlier than the second or first century BC—the period to which may also be ascribed the biographies of *tīrthaṃkaras* in the *Kappasutta*. The voluminous *Bhagavatī* (fifth *aṅga*), containing a great deal of disparate material about Mahāvīra, his teachings, disciples and his relations with other contemporaries, such as Gosāla, may belong to the 'second stratum' of the canon, datable to the second or first century BC. Some of its sections could be even closer to the Valabhī Council (fifth century AD, presided over by Devardhigaṇin). The highly ornate prose style of the *Ovavaiya* (first *upāṅga*) comes in the way of ascribing much antiquity to it. It is dated to the early centuries AD. Much commentarial literature on the *Avassayasutta* (third *mūlasutta*) having quasi-canonical status evolved between the third and seventh centuries AD.

4.4 The *Dhamma* of the Buddha

The Buddha, *Dhamma* (Doctrine) and *Saṃgha* (the Order) are the Three Jewels (*triratnas*) which were taken by the followers of the Buddha soon after the death of the Master to form their basic profession of faith. The formula of faith in this trinity occurs in the Bairat Rock Edict of Ashoka (third century BC), and every Buddhist, both monastic and lay, affirms this formula of faith to this day.

Certain facts about the Buddha's life are reasonably well known. Siddhārtha was his childhood name. He was the son of Mahāmayā and Suddhodhana (Sākya chief). Siddhārtha had ascetic leanings that could not be contained even after his marriage to his cousin Yasodharā and the birth of their son Rāhula.

The sights of an old man, a diseased man and a corpse being carried to the cremation ground deeply affected Siddhārtha. The fourth

sight, viz. that of a wandering religious beggar clad in a simple yellow robe, peaceful and calm with a mien of inward joy, turned Siddhārtha's thoughts towards renunciation. He left his wife and son behind and became a wandering ascetic. Doubts still assailed him. A discourse on meditation by Ālāra Kālāma, and severe penances in the company of five ascetics failed to satisfy him. One day, when he was 35, he sat under a large *pipal* tree (to be called and revered as the *Bodhi* tree—the Tree of Wisdom) on the outskirts of the town of Gaya in the realm of Bimbisāra (King of Magadha) (see *Figure 4.2*). He was served a large bowl of rice boiled in milk by Sujātā, the daughter of a nearby farmer, whereafter he took a vow not to leave his seat till the riddle of suffering was solved. After 49 days of contemplation he obtained Enlightenment, and so became the Buddha (the 'Enlightened'). Thereafter, leaving the *Bodhi* tree, he journeyed to the Deer Park (modern Sarnath) near Banaras, where his five former companions had settled to continue their penances. To these five ascetics the Buddha preached his First Sermon, thereby setting in motion the *Dhamma-chakka-pavattana* ('Turning the Wheel of *Dhamma*'). This sermon is part of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* (see below). The Buddha preached for over 40 years. He spent his last rainy season in his eightieth year near the city of Vaishali. At the town of Pāvā, he was entertained by a lay disciple, Chunda the smith. Soon thereafter, he was attacked by dysentery but he insisted on moving on to the nearby town of Kusinārā (near modern Gorakhpur). Here, on the outskirts of the town, he lay down under a *sal* tree and passed away. *Atta dīpo bhava* ('Be a Lamp unto Yourself') were his last words. His sorrowing disciples cremated his body and his ashes were divided amongst the representatives of various sub-Himalayan clans, especially the Mallas, while a share was claimed by King Ajātasattu of Magadha. We must recognize that much of this biography consists of later day creations, with variant versions, though large parts of it are quite plausible. As to the date of his death, scholars have usually placed it around 484 BC, though there is now a suggestion that it could have occurred a hundred years later (see *Note 3.1*).

The essence of the Buddha's teachings is traditionally believed to have been propounded by him in his 'First Sermon' at Sarnath. A report of it tells us:

FIGURE 4.2 The *Bodhi* tree under which Gautama Buddha the Sākya Muni obtained Enlightenment: Bharhut sculpture (second century BC) with inscribed label, *Bhagavato Sāka Munino Bodhi.* (Reprod. B. Barua)

Thus have I heard. Once the Master was at Banaras, at the Deer Park called Isipatana (the Sage's Resort). There the Master addressed the five monks:

'There are two ends not to be served by a wanderer. What are those two? The pursuit of desires and of the pleasure which springs from desires, which is base, common, leading to rebirth, ignoble and unprofitable; and the pursuit of pain and hardship, which is grievous, ignoble and unprofitable. The Middle Way of the Tathāgata avoids both these ends; it is enlightened, it brings clear vision, it makes for wisdom, and leads to peace, insight, full wisdom and *nibbāna*. What is the Middle Way? It is the Noble Eightfold Path (*aṭṭhāṅgika magga*): Right Understanding (*sammā diṭṭhi*), Right Resolve (*sammā saṅkappo*), Right Speech *(sammā vāchā*), Right Conduct (*sammā kammanto*), Right Livelihood *(sammā ājīvo*), Right Effort (*sammā vāyāmo*), Right Recollection or Mindfulness (*sammā sati*) and Right Meditation (*sammā samādhi*). . . .

'And this is the Noble Truth (*ariya sachchāni*) of suffering (*dukkha*): Birth is sorrow, age is sorrow, disease is sorrow, death is sorrow, contact with the unpleasant is sorrow, separation from the pleasant is sorrow, every wish unfulfilled is sorrow—in short all the five components of individuality are sorrow.'

'And this is the Noble Truth of the Arising (*samudāya*, cause) of suffering. It arises from thirst, which leads to rebirth, which brings delight and passion, and seeks pleasure now here, now there—the thirst for sensual pleasure; the thirst for continued life; the thirst for power.'

'And this is the Noble Truth of the cessation (*nirodha*) of suffering. It is the complete stopping of that thirst, so that no passion remains, leaving it, being emancipated from it, being released from it, giving no place to it.'

'And this is the Noble Truth of the Way (*magga*) which leads to the cessation of suffering. It is the Noble Eightfold Path.'

The Buddha would not claim that there is no happiness in the world, but that in some form or other sorrow was inevitable in life. 'As ocean has only one flavour, the flavour of salt,' the Buddha is purported to have said, 'so has my doctrine only one flavour—the flavour of

emancipation from suffering.' In ordinary existence sorrow cannot be long escaped. But those who think that pleasure, merriment and love, being opposed to suffering, can be sources of joy are mistaken. It is just otherwise. These, too, give rise to suffering, as all of one's wishes cannot be fulfilled. It is only when one frees oneself from these that the source of sorrow and fear are eliminated. Two beautiful verses in the *Dhammapada* say:

> From merriment arise grief and fear. To one who is free from merriment, there is no grief. How can then there be fear?
> From love and affection arise grief and fear. To one who is free from these, there is no grief. How can there be fear then?

The talk of *dukkha* would have been impossible if the Buddha had not been aware of what its opposite, i.e., *sukkha*, was. One of the Buddha's great achievements was his ability to analyse the terrain of the human mind. The entire system of his thought has an alternative name, viz., *vibhajjavāda*: Doctrine of Analysis. The *Dhammapada* begins with the following pair of verses which show the primacy attached to the mind and mental process:

> The mental nature is the result of what we have thought. Mind is the forerunner of all states. Mind is chief, all states are mind-made. If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, sorrow follows him as a consequence, even as the (cart-)wheel follows the foot of the drawer.
> . . . If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows him in consequence like a shadow that never leaves him.

The whole of *Dhamma* is not merely a set of philosophical tenets; it is a path, which leads one to total annihilation of suffering. The Buddha said: 'Two things, O monks, I teach, suffering and the total annihilation of suffering.'

Since craving or desire is at the bottom of all human suffering, it is necessary to work for its elimination. That it is possible to achieve it through the pursuance of the Eightfold Path is shown quite tellingly in the story of the Buddha's cousin Nanda who was madly in love with Janapada Kalyāṇī and, therefore, neglected the duties of the Crown Prince. The Buddha promised him more beautiful celestial

nymphs provided he followed his Eightfold Path. Once Nanda could put himself on to the Path, he not only had no desire for the damsels of heaven but developed complete equanimity of mind towards Kalyāṇī and attended to his state duties as well.

The root of the craving itself is *avijjā* (ignorance). Ignorance primarily concerns the fundamental nature of things, which has three salient characteristics: (1) the universality of sorrow (*dukkha*); (2) 'all is transient' (*anichcha*); and (3) 'all is substanceless' (*anattā*).

The universe is held to be in a constant flux, and all idea of permanence is part of the basic ignorance out of which suffering springs. Nor is there any place for any immortal soul (*ātman*) that the Upanishads spoke about. The Buddha firmly held to the position of *anatta* ('no *ātman*'). Like the system of the Jainas, the Buddhist system, too, had no place for the Creator–God. Terms like 'individual', 'person' and so on, were merely convenient labels for a series of separate momentary events which continued indefinitely, just as the word 'chariot' was a convenient label for a collection of pieces of wood and metal put together in a certain manner.

Two oft-quoted similes invoked by the Buddha to explain transience and substancelessness of things are those of waves in rivers and the ocean, and the flame of a lamp. Just as one wave is succeeded by another without being its cause or effect—the relationship being merely that of consecution of time, so is the case with life. Again, the flame of the lamp, constantly burning, creates the illusion of permanence and its yellowness. Behind its outward appearance lie numerous hues. That, indeed, was the case with the form of things. 'O Monk! The Form is (ever) Burning', said the Buddha.

The realization of the true nature of things in terms of their transience and substancelessness is *nibbāna*. It is the Knowledge that dawns. Literally, it is Dying Out or Extinction of *vāna*, i.e. lust, and not the dying out of Soul, for, no Soul existed for the Buddha. The conception of *nibbāna* completes the cycle of early Buddhist thought.

There are some topics which the Buddha refused to discuss, for he considered them futile. Such were:

1. Is the universe permanent or not permanent?
2. Is the universe with or without an ending?
3. Is the soul identical with the body or separate from it?

4. Do the Tathāgatas live or not live after their passing away, or neither live nor not live?

When Māluṅkyaputta asked the reason for the Buddha's silence on these questions, the Master replied:

> I have not committed myself on the above topics, as their discussion is purposeless, it is fruitless and does not help anybody to remain non-attached to the *saṃsāra*, it does not help one to attain enlightenment, it does not help one to realize *nibbāna*.

Buddhism placed the inculcation of ethical virtues on a high practical pedestal. The four cardinal virtues stressed by the Buddha included love, piety, joy and serenity. It also required human sympathy.

> As the Master was going on a round of inspection, visiting the monks in their cells, he found one who was sick with dysentery, and who had fallen from his bed and lay in his own ordure. With his own hands the Buddha washed the sick man from head to foot, laid him comfortably on his bed, and gave a new rule to the order:
>
> 'Brethren, you have no mother or father to care for you. If you do not care for one another who else will do so? Brethren, he who would care for me should care for the sick.' (*Vinaya Piṭaka*)

It was under the influence of such teachings that emperor Ashoka (*c.* 270–234 BC) established hospitals and that Buddhist monks have at all times studied medical lore and treated laymen as well as fellow monks. The Buddha himself is called *mahābhiṣhaja*, the great physician.

The Buddha's instructions to laymen, partly included in the 'Ten Precepts of Good Conduct' (*Dasa Sīla*), expected them to (1) avoid taking life, (2) avoid stealing, (3) avoid indulgence in sensuality, (4) avoid lying, (5) avoid intoxication, (6) avoid slandering and reviling others, (7) avoid self-praise, (8) avoid avarice and covetousness, (9) avoid enmity and malevolence, and (10) avoid heretical views and deriding the *tri-ratnas* (the Three Jewels). The Buddha tended to encourage mildness in justice, and peaceableness in a time of much warfare. In one story he himself intervened in a war between two clans—the Sākyas and their neighbours the Koḷiyas, and persuaded the contestants to come to terms. The *Dhammapada*, an early collection of Buddhist verse, has two substantive injunctions on this issue:

> Not at anytime are enmities appeased here through enmity, but they are appeased through non-enmity. This is the eternal law.
>
> Victory breeds hatred; the conquered dwells in sorrow. He who has given up (thoughts of both) victory and defeat, he is calm and lives happily.

The Pali Canon

The significance of our period lies in the fact that for the first time we start getting literary texts in non-Sanskrit languages. It is generally recognized that the Buddha, Mahāvīra, and Maṅkhaliputta Gosāla, communicated with their followers only in such languages. A noted scholar of Indian literatures once remarked that often the name of a language is not given by its speakers, but by others. This would aptly apply to the language of texts in which discourses of the Buddha are found. European scholars, who initiated studies in these texts, designated the language 'Pali'. Such a name for the language, however, is not seen within the textual tradition itself. The phrase *pāli-bhāsa* occurs in later chronicles and commentaries, but more in the sense of 'canon', or 'language of the canon', than as the name of a particular language. Somehow, however, between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, it acquired the currency of a specific religious language in Sri Lanka, Thailand and Myanmar (Burma).

The early commentaries describe the language of the Buddha, taken to be identical with the language of the canon, as Māgadhī. This is declared to be the *mūla-bhāsā*, the root language of all languages. Are Pali and Māgadhī synonymous? What we know of Māgadhī as described by the later day grammarians enables us to answer the question in the negative. One thing remains absolutely certain, viz. the Buddha did not preach in Sanskrit. It seems that he was a strong supporter of using the language of the area where he was preaching. As Buddhism spread in various parts of north India, attempts were made to render varied redactions transmitted through memorized versions into a roughly homogeneous language. It is quite plausible that since a serious effort to codify the canon was undertaken in the time of emperor Ashoka, the prestige attached to the kingdom of Magadha may have prompted the designation of the language of the canon as Māgadhī. Those who have studied the texts of the early Buddhist canon as well

as early Indian inscriptions tend to think that grammatical formations in the canon come very close to the language of the Hathigumpha inscription, which is described as 'Prakrit resembling Pali'. This inscription, belonging to Khāravela, the Jaina ruler of Kaliṅga (part of ancient Orissa), is generally dated to about the end of the first century BC.

The early Buddhist (Theravādin) tradition enumerates several *saṅgītis* (Councils) that were held to recite and codify the Pali canon. Between the death of the Buddha and the death of Ashoka (*c.* 234 BC), as many as three such councils are known to this tradition. All the schools of Buddhism agree that the first *saṅgīti* was held soon after the death (*mahāparinibbāna*) of the Master. The *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya* gives the motive but not a word about the session of the Council. The immediate cause seems to have been the conduct of monk Subhadda who thought that the Buddha's *mahāparinibbāna* provided license for monks to hold beliefs independent of the Master's teaching. Apart from Subhadda, there were many others who felt that with the Buddha's passing away the *Dhamma* he had taught would disappear. This feeling of doubt occasioned the First Council. King Ajātasattu (Ajātashatru) of Magadha offered the patronage and the Council seems to have met somewhere in the hills of Rājagaha (modern Rajgir in district Nalanda, Bihar)—the exact venue being difficult to determine. As many as 500 *bhikkhus* are said to have assembled and Mahākassapa presided over the deliberations. He asked Upāli and Ānanda about the *vinaya* and the *dhamma* respectively. According to the late commentarial tradition recorded by the renowned Buddhaghosa, in addition to Ānanda being responsible for the *Dīgha Nikāya*, Sāriputta, Mahākassapa himself and Anuruddha were given the charge of *Majjhima*, *Saṃyutta* and *Aṅguttara Nikāyas*, respectively. While the *vinaya* was concerned with the norms of conduct for the inmates of the *saṃgha*, the *dhamma* formed the essentials of the Master's teachings. As the leading brethren expounded these matters, the other monks repeated their formulations. This was probably the beginning of the system of the *bhāṇakas* ('reciters'), which has been quite instrumental in the making of the canon. It is accepted by critical scholarship that the First Council settled the bulk of *Sutta* and *Vinaya Piṭakas*, but there is no ground for the view that the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* formed part of the canon adopted at this Council.

Following a dispute over certain points of discipline, a Second Council was held at Vaishali about one hundred years after the death of the Buddha. The famous chronicles of Sri Lanka (the *Dīpavaṃsa* and the *Mahāvaṃsa*) tell us that 700 *bhikkhus*, who were masters or reciters of the three *piṭakas*, attended this Council or *dhammasaṃgaha*. This implies that the Council was not confined to matters of monastic discipline and must have dealt with doctrinal matters as well. It seems that the geographical spread of the Buddha's message had taken considerable strides, for, monks of Avanti and those of faraway western and southern countries also took part. The conspicuous role of the venerable Yasha is recorded in several versions of this *saṅgīti*, where the conduct of Vajjian monks came under scrutiny. While Yasha apparently successfully managed to get their conduct declared unlawful, the Council could not prevent a major schism. The monks who could not subscribe to the point of view of Yasha, convened another Council, in which 10,000 (?) monks participated. It came to be known as the great congregation (*mahāsaṅgīti*) and monks attending it were called the Mahāsāṅghikas, as distinguished from the monks of the older order, the Theravādins or Sthaviravādins.

The Sri Lankan tradition embodied in the *Mahāvaṃsa* states that the Third Buddhist Council was held in the reign of emperor Ashoka (*c.* 270–34 BC). Surprisingly, however, the emperor's edicts make no mention of this. But the fact that the Mauryan emperor was seized of schismatic tendencies within the Buddhist *saṃgha*, is definitely attested in his Schism Edicts inscribed on pillars at Sarnath, Allahabad and Sanchi. According to the literary tradition, the Third Council was held at Pāṭaliputra and was presided over by monk Moggaliputta Tissa. A thousand monks are said to have assembled at the Mauryan capital and deliberated over the true *dhamma* for nine months. During these deliberations, 'heretical' doctrines were thoroughly examined and refuted, and possibly the compilation of the *Tipiṭaka* was completed. (See *Mauryan India*, pp. 73,144, 159, 163). The other chronicle of Sri Lanka, i.e., the *Dīpavaṃsa* tells us how Moggaliputta sent missions to different parts of the world after this Council. This may be an echo of the *dhamma* missions mentioned in the edicts of Ashoka.

The first schism after the Second Buddhist Council was followed by a series of schisms and within three or four hundred years

after the Buddha's death (*mahāparinibbāna*), eleven sub-sects arose out of the Theravāda while the Mahāsāṅghikas gave rise to another seven sub-sects. The great division between Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism, which ultimately separated southern from northern Budhism was, however, a phenomenon of the early centuries AD. The Mahāyāna schools have their scriptural literature in Sanskrit, Tibetan, Chinese and Japanese, which in part contains differently arranged materials that correspond to portions of the Pali canon, but there is much else besides. The Pali canon has been preserved exclusively by the Theravādins of Sri Lanka.

The chronicles of Sri Lanka also tell us that during the reign of Sri Lankan ruler Vaṭṭagāmaṇī Abhaya (*c.* 29–17 BC), the monks who had previously remembered the *Tipiṭaka* and communicated them orally now wrote them down in books, because of the threat posed by famine, war and the growing power of the newly established Abhayagiri *vihāra* enjoying the king's favour. This tradition of committing the canon to writing does not imply that the growth of the canon completely ceased thereafter. As we shall see, several texts of the Pali canon continued to be worked upon even after that date.

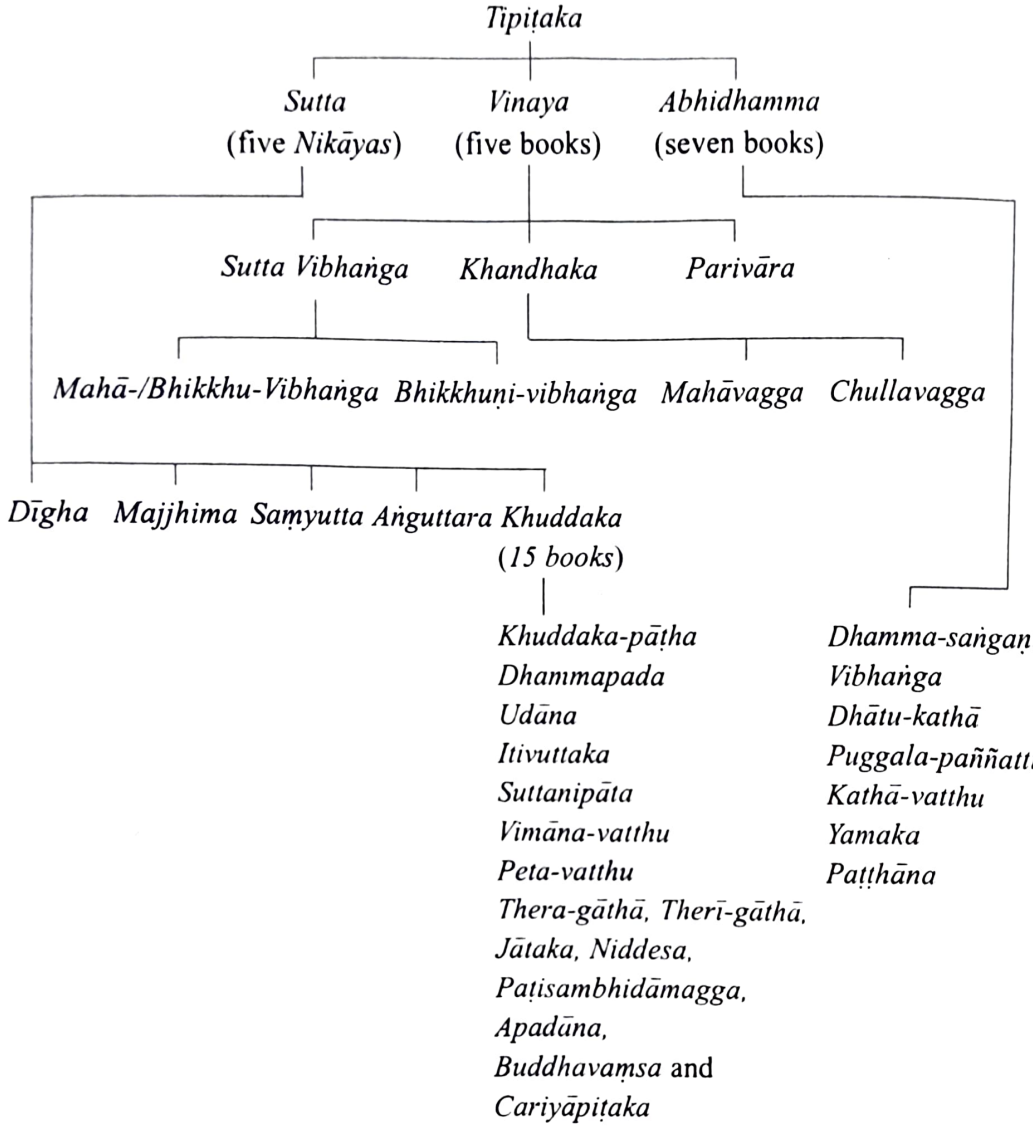
The canon's structure, as it stands today, is diagrammatically shown in *Table 4.2*.

This structure is perhaps neither the oldest nor the best known. Amongst older enumerations, as for example in the *Majjhima Nikāya*, the canon is classified into nine *aṅgas*; and these are specified in Buddhaghosa's commentary *Papañchasūdanī*.

It is likely that the list of nine *aṅgas* was far from being an enumeration of specific works of the canon. It was, in all probability, a description of various types of texts. The change from this old ninefold classification into one of *dhamma* (*sutta*) and *vinaya* probably took place at the First Buddhist Council, and, as mentioned already, the third *piṭaka* (*Abhidhamma*) may have been worked out at the Third Council. The post-Ashokan inscriptions, such as those from Bharhut, seem to be familiar with the 'knowers of *piṭakas*'.

Buddhaghosa uses the term 'five *nikāyas*' for the canon, but it is almost universally accepted that he also described the *Sutta-* or *Suttanta Piṭaka* as comprising five *nikāyas: Dīgha, Majjhima, Saṃyutta, Aṅguttara* and *Khuddaka*. Sometimes the Pali canon also uses the word

TABLE 4.2 The *Tipiṭaka* and its Components



āgama almost as a synonym for *nikāya*. All *nikāyas*, except the *Khuddaka*, consist of discourses (*suttas*) ascribed to the Buddha or, but rarely, to one of his disciples. Most of the *suttas* are in prose. However, some (*Mahāsamaya* and the *Āṭānāṭiya Suttas* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*) are almost entirely in verse. The length of the *sutta* is supposedly the basis of the naming of the first two *nikāyas*—the *Dīgha* containing the long and the *Majjhima* the middle-length discourses. However, the present length is no indicator of the actual volume of the original discourse because of later interpolations. *Saṃyutta* gets the appellation perhaps

because the *suttas* in it are arranged together according to their contents. The *Aṅguttara Nikāya* has its contents arranged according to size, with each *nipāta* being longer than the previous one. The list of 15 books of the *Khuddaka Nikāya*, as given above in *Table 4.2*, is the generally accepted one. However, Buddhaghosa tells us of the reservations of the reciters of the *Dīgha Nikāya* (*Dīgha bhāṅakas*) about this arrangement. The Pali tradition in Myanmar has a list of 19 books, including the *Milindapañha*, under this *nikāya*.

Broadly, the *Vinaya Piṭaka* is concerned with the growth of Buddhist monasticism. The *Suttavibhaṅga* lays down 227 and 311 rules for the conduct of *bhikkhus* (monks) and *bhikkhuṇis* (nuns), respectively. These rules deal with such aspects as formal meetings of the *saṃgha*, expiation, confession, training, and legal questions. The *Khandhaka* (*Mahāvagga* and *Chullavagga*) also deals with rules of conduct for the *saṃgha*, but these are set in the framework of the biography of the Buddha. Stories are told to illustrate the circumstances in which the rules were first promulgated. These rules have been classified by subject matter, for example, all rules pertaining to medicines have been grouped together. The *Parivāra* is a kind of supplement to the *Vinaya*. Portions of it were possibly added in Sri Lanka, because it includes a long list of teachers who were responsible for teaching the *Vinaya* in Jambudīpa (India) and Tambapanni (Sri Lanka). The dates ascribed to the *Parivāra* range between about the first century BC and first century AD.

As already mentioned, the early Pali canon was put to writing in Sri Lanka in the first century BC. The bulk of this canon was formed at the first two councils. The dates of these councils, as seen above, are related to the demise of the Buddha, which in turn, is put at a time given in terms of the consecration of Ashoka Maurya. However, the dates of these events have been the subject of some debate amongst scholars (see *Note 3.1*). Essentially, there are two different traditions of Buddhist texts embodied in (a) north (Indian) *Vinaya Piṭaka* recensions, and (b) the southern, viz. Sri Lankan chronicles. While the northern tradition tells us that the Buddha's *mahāparinibbāna* (death) took place 100 or 110 years before the consecration of Ashoka, the chronicles of Sri Lanka give a rather precise figure of 218 years. Of the two chronicles, the *Dīpavaṃsa*'s compilation is generally ascribed to *c.* AD 400), while

the *Mahāvaṃsa* took shape much later—its initial portion seems to have been composed in the twelfth century AD. The accounts in both the northern and Sri Lankan traditions have witnessed several additions and embellishments, sometimes bordering on fantasy.

Besides the date of the Buddha, differently given in the two traditions (Sri Lankan and northern), there is the problem of dating the various parts of the Pali canon. Like the corpus of 'Vedic literature', it is a huge mass of material and with similar problems of chronological stratification. Certainly, not all parts of the Pali canon are equally old or can be literally taken to be the Buddha's precise words. This does not, however, imply a rejection of the authenticity or antiquity of all portions of the canon.

In the present state of our knowledge, it may not be very far off the mark to suggest that the chronological span of the extant Pali canon is roughly the same as is often attributed to the texts of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*, i.e., *c.* 400 BC to *c.* AD 400. However, the major problem of inter-textual and intra-textual stratification within this period remains to be resolved. Simply put, we need to figure out (a) which of the three *piṭakas* is the earliest, (b) within a *piṭaka*, which book has chronological precedence, and (c) which are the early and later *suttas* within a book. Govind Chandra Pande's *Studies in the Origins of Buddhism*, was a pioneering attempt in this direction. Recognizing that an engagement with such an exercise can at best be very subjective, Pande focused on the first four *Nikāyas* and some books of the *Khuddaka Nikāya* (of the *Sutta Piṭaka*)—the *Vinaya* recensions and the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* have been touched only marginally.

His general assessment is as follows:

> The evidence for ascertaining the chronology of the canon, of which the Pali version is still available in its entirety, is . . . small, but it may be asserted that the growth of the *Nikāyas* falls between the 5th and the 3rd centuries BC. The fact that the *Nikāyas* take but slight notice of the issues contested by the earliest sects, certainly suggests that they had practically reached completion in the 1st century AB (after the death of the Buddha). The silence of the *Vinaya* over the third Council suggests that it had reached completion in the first two centuries AB. The silence of the canon over

Ashoka, which contrasts so strongly with the later tradition, is also significant in this respect and suggests its antiquity.

Notwithstanding this assessment and Buddhaghosa's assertion that the canon is 'uniform in sentiment', it must be recognized that hardly any Pali text is a unitary production and almost all the texts are made up of materials of different dates. Thus, for instance, Pande has not only classified 34 *suttas* of the *Dīgha Nikāya* into 'Early', 'Late', 'Composite' and 'Uncertain' strata without assigning any specific dates to them, he has also identified specific portions within a *sutta* which may belong to different times. Such a pattern can be noticed in Pande's reconstruction of the texts of other *Nikāyas* as well.

The Success of Buddhism

The Buddha, through his preaching, aimed at making a statement of human growth. His concern about death, illness, old age, deprivation, his indifference to status in spiritual matters, his forceful perception of constant change, make him an outstanding thinker. His was a voice that sought to strike a remarkable balance between the cultures of the countryside and the fast emerging townships, and that too in the language of the people.

It is now time to reflect on factors that helped to bring about this intellectual ferment that the *Dhamma* of the Buddha, the teaching of Mahāvīra and their numerous other contemporary thinkers represent. The rurality which sustained Vedism was undoubtedly being transformed, not just by the close harnessing of agriculture with animal husbandry, but also by the distinctive emergence of urbanism and commercial networks. The intensive religious and philosophic speculations setting the tone of intellectual ferment, were apparently more in tune with the new urban ethos of the Ganga plains than the Vedism of the past. That explains the specific positions adopted by many contemporary thinkers on *ahiṃsā* and moneylending. While Vedism revolved around the killing of animals at large ritual sacrifices, both the Buddha and Mahāvīra spoke up for the protection of cattle wealth. The Buddha specially referred to cattle as *annadā*, *vannadā* and *sukhadā*, i.e., givers of food, beauty and happiness. Similarly, the interests of creditors and moneylenders were duly protected and debtors were firmly reminded of

their obligations. It may be recalled that Brahmanical lawgivers, on the contrary, despised those who indulged in moneylending. The thrust on truth, justice, non-stealing, non-covetousness and injunctions against adultery noticeable in the systems of the Buddha and Mahāvīra show a realization of a firm concept of private individual property and a more rigid concept of the family. Such ethics were necessary for the prosperity of the *saṃgha* which depended on the patronage of peasants, traders and property owners. These were also necessary for the legitimate activities of *seṭṭhis* and *gahapatis*, who constituted a new socio-economic force and a major support for the new religious movements.

It has also been argued that the doctrine of *ahiṁsā* could be invoked by heads of peasant communities, wishing to expand into the domain of the forest tribes, which mainly lived by hunting and killing animals. The latter occupation was naturally held blameworthy in the eyes of *ahiṁsā* preachers, and this could, in turn, justify the subjugation of the forest tribes at the hands of the higher elements of rural society. In this way, too, Buddhism and Jainism could appeal to the sentiments of the rural *gahapatis*.

The spirit of the new religious ferment was perhaps best summed up in the following words of the Buddha:

> O Kālāmas, not by hearsay, not by tradition, not by customary, not by bookish authority, not by mere sophistry, not by an exalted example, not by a grand form, not by the glamour of a philosophical view, not by grandeur, and not with the thought that one's teacher should be respected. But O Kālāmas be guided by your own knowledge and convictions. (*Aṅguttara Nikāya*)

Such a reasoned voice was clearly a heavy below to Vedic dogmatism. To deny the authority of the Veda, as both the Buddha and Mahāvīra did, was to deny the authority of the Brāhmaṇas. Surely, such a call must have caused quite a major ideological upheaval.

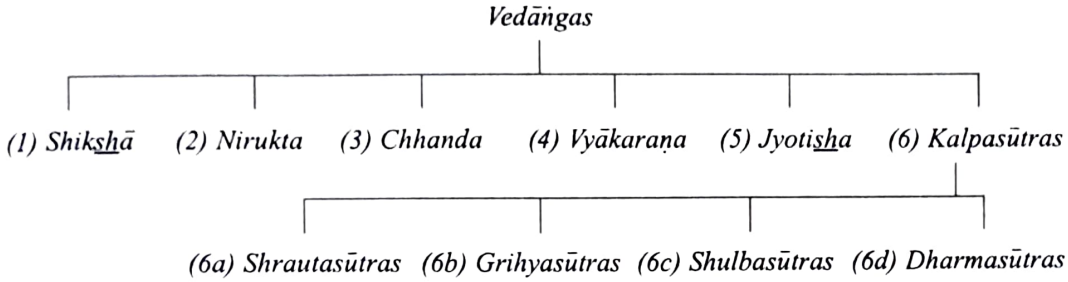
We have so far concerned ourselves with the material, social and intellectual environment in which the new religious ferment had its roots. But we cannot leave the subject of the origins of Buddhism without considering how it could become the earliest of the only three major trans-civilizational religions in the world, the other two being Christianity and Islam. Even by the time of Ashoka (*c.* 270–234 BC),

Buddhism had as yet not spread into India's northwestern borderland, for Ashoka acknowledged in his Rock Edict XIII that there were no Samanas, as well as Brāhmaṇas, among the Yonas. But Ashoka himself implied in his Rock Edicts IV and XIII, as well as through his Aramaic and Greek edicts, that the message of the *dhaṁma* (morality) that he preached was as much addressed to non-Indians and the Hellenic kingdoms, as to his own subjects. His *dhaṁma* is not to be identified with Buddhism, certainly, but it will be difficult to argue that, as an acknowledged Buddhist, his attitude of universality was not shaped by Buddhism. If it was so shaped, then, this has an important bearing on our understanding of the degree of universalism in early Buddhism. For this means that the subsequent expansion of the faith in Central Asia, China, Japan, Sri Lanka and South-East Asia was not the result of happy accidents or quirks of dynastic patronage, but drew on certain strong traits within original Buddhism. One could see it as a natural outgrowth of the detachment from the Brahmanical order that gave the religion a capacity to adjust easily to non-Indian environments when it came into contact with them. Or, and additionally, one could locate it in its concept of the universality of *dukkha*, which was so deep-rooted among its practitioners that they were inspired to carry the message of solace and rescue to all corners of the globe. There is naturally much room for reflection and speculation here. The signal fact, of course, remains that the message of the Buddha was ultimately destined deeply to influence the lives of countless millions down the ages, not only in India but in the whole of Asia, east of Iran.

4.5 Brahmanism and Brahmanical Texts

The appearance of the new religions of Mahāvīra and the Buddha should not make us overlook the fact that Brahmanism, with its rituals and social customs (increasingly influenced by caste), continued to maintain its strength. Large numbers of texts in 'Vedic Sanskrit' were composed; and these by their size fairly balance the large amount of non-Sanskrit literature that was brought into being under the influence of the new religions. To our period can be ascribed the large corpus of *sūtra* texts. Literally meaning 'thread', texts classed as *sūtras* refer to copious writing composed in a style that sought to compress as much information as possible, often in very cryptic formulae that were easy

to memorize. Six classes of *sūtras* are recognized as *Vedāṅgas*, i.e., limbs of the Vedas. These can be tabulated as follows:



Shikṣhā deals with pronunciation of Vedic mantras. *Nirukta* is concerned with etymology, i.e., origin and formation of Vedic words. *Chhanda*, as its name implies, acquaints us with metrical formation of Vedic *mantras*. *Vyākaraṇa* is concerned with grammar. *Jyotiṣha* deals with astronomy. *Kalpasūtras* constitute ceremonial guides or didactic manuals on ritual practice. These consist of several types of texts, some of which can perhaps be ascribed to the period. Broadly, the following four sub-divisions of the *Kalpasūtras* can be identified: *Shrautasūtras* incorporate such rituals as were derived from *shrutis* (the Vedas, Brāhmaṇas, etc.) Often, these were public ceremonies, such as the *rājasūya* and *ashvamedha*. *Grihyasūtras* contain detailed prescriptions about domestic rituals, especially *saṃskāras* (sacraments), such as the ones connected with birth, marriage, death, etc. *Shulbasūtras*, directly attached to the *Shrautasūtras*, lay down norms, methods and minute rules regarding the measurement and construction of sacrificial altars. And, finally, *Dharmasūtras* prescribe the norms of the daily conduct of individuals and the consequences of their violations. In so far as they deal with supposedly 'correct behaviour', including the duties, lawful occupations of classes of society, stages of life, ritual purity, dietary laws, punishments and penances, *Dharmasūtras* share some of their themes with the *Grihyasūtras*.

Many of the *Vedāṅgas* were composed to recall, and perhaps to preserve for posterity, the correct diction and meaning of the Vedas and Vedic words. This could be taken as an indication of the widening gulf between the contemporary Brahmanical society and the original Vedic religion. The fact that Yāska had to produce *Nirukta* (perhaps dating from *c.* 500 BC) within about five hundred years of the compilation

of the *Rigveda*, shows that even the Brāhmaṇas learned in the Vedic lore were tending to forget the true meaning of many words that the seers had used in the *Rigveda*.

Some of the prominent names of the authors of *sūtra* texts are: Āpastamba, Baudhāyana, Gautama, Vasishṭha, Jaiminī, Āshvalāyana, and Shāṅkhāyana. Generally speaking, most of these individuals are shadowy figures. Tradition often ascribes the authorship of important texts to famous teachers and heads of schools. It is very likely that a work in its present form was edited or revised by members of the family claiming to be descended from a mythical figure, whose name was then given to it. Others might have been the work of 'schools' whose members claimed to be the followers of some renowned teachers. Some, like Āpastamba, however, may have been real names and not those of schools or families.

There is little internal evidence for the **chronological stratification** of *sūtra* texts. However, some scholars are of the opinion that 'the general period of the *sūtras*' extends from the sixth or seventh century BC to about the second century AD. A recent study of the *dharmasūtras* of Āpastamba, Gautama, Baudhāyana and Vasishṭha puts the period of these texts between the fourth century BC and the first century AD. An overlap of various sub-divisions of *Kalpasūtras* should be regarded as a distinct possibility. The alleged simplicity and less elaborate character of a ceremony is not necessarily an indicator of the relative antiquity either of the ceremony *per se* or of the text which describes it. It is very likely that a ritual that developed and became elaborate in one community may have remained comparatively simple in another. However, allusions to the Greek sequence of the planets and days of the week named after these planets, which could not have been introduced into India before the fourth century BC, are obvious indications of later additions to the concerned texts.

Most of the *sūtra* texts had a limited **geographical spread**. The Āshvalāyanas may have had their focus in the 'Āryavarta' (the region between the Himalayas and the Vindhyas as defined by the *Manusmriti*), but were in later times widely dispersed in Bengal and the Andhra country. The followers of Shāṅkhāyana were less widely esteemed and lived in Kanauj and Malwa. The Jaiminīyas, now a very rare school surviving in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, seem to have belonged

mainly to the south. Geographical references in the *Lāṭyāyana* point to its northwestern origin, while the *Khādira Grihyasūtra* was probably a southern domestic manual. The Taittirīyas seem to have originated in northern or eastern India. Baudhāyana has sometimes been located in the Andhra region.

The importance of the *sūtras* for students of cultural anthropology, comparative religion and the history of people in general may be briefly reviewed. In this respect the *Grihyasūtras* are a source of relatively more copious information than the *Shrauta* texts, which, though not devoid of sidelights on social and cultural circumstances, concentrate completely on ritual and ceremonial details. Notwithstanding their 'aphoristic' style, both classes of *sūtras* contain numerous references to social life, the position of women, dress and ornaments, furniture, weapons and instruments, food and drink, games and amusements, arts and crafts, the building of houses, domesticated animals, agriculture, music, education, astronomy, measurements, and, of course, various aspects of magic and religion.

The *Grihyasūtras* practically recognize social life only as country or village life. Outside the village (*grāma*) is the wilderness, the land neither cultivated nor grazed (*araṇya*) is often referred to as a place of retirement, isolation or banishment. We are informed of numerous popular beliefs incorporated in some ritual or the other—all rooted in the rural milieu. If a man has no appetite or he is seriously ill, he should eat two of the rice balls offered to his deceased ancestors. One should not partake of fruits of the new harvest before performing the *agnihotra* ritual; girls named after asterisms, trees and rivers are contemptible. Sacred grass, the hide of an antelope, *mantras* and Brāhmaṇas do not lose their holy power if they are employed more than once, but *mantras* are desecrated in the mouth of a Shūdra.

Though admitting some new and uncommon deities to their pantheon, for example, Mahārāja, invoked by those who built a house, and Shāka and Jañjabha, worshipped at *samāvartana*, the *sūtras* fully recognize the important gods—'the three times eleven'—of the earlier period. Whereas their role in the solemn rites is largely traditional, the *Grihyasūtras* give an impression of their specialized functions and concerns in the various domestic and popular rites. Among them Agni, 'the first of the gods' and bearer of the oblations, a great source of energy

and insight, a protector of men, giver of power and wealth, invoked at all fire rites, is the foremost: 'Thou whom we have set to work, O Jātavedas, carry forward (our offerings). O Agni, perceive this rite as it is performed (by us). Thou art a healer, a creator of medicine. Through thee may we obtain cows, horses and men. Hail, *Svāhā*!'

Under various circumstances, Indra, though not equal to Agni in importance but largely responsible for the sacrificer's welfare, is invoked, or one of his deeds commemorated mainly in the solemn rites. Soma and Varuṇa also continue to be major gods in the *Grihyasūtras*. In the religion of the masses Rudra, invoked under many names, was chiefly propitiated for the sake of the well-being of cattle and besought to save the sacrificer and his herd from his destructive wrath. The 'spit-ox' sacrifice is offered to him in order to ensure prosperity and at the end of every domestic sacrifice he received a special oblation, the *yajñavastu*.

Worship is accorded to a considerable number of goddesses. Sītā, literally 'furrow', is an agricultural deity entitled to a special sacrifice. Sometimes she is seen accompanying Āshā ('hope'), Āradā and Anaghā, who were also invoked to protect the interests of cultivators. Other female deities are: the Earth, Vāshini, Anumati, Shrī, Rudra's sister Ambikā, such figures as Hrī ('Modesty'), Puṣhṭi ('Prosperity'), as well as Indrāṇī, Varuṇānī, Rudrāṇī the consorts of the great male gods, Indra, Varuṇa and Rudra. We find in these texts, for the first time, references to images of gods: Īshāna ('the Lord') and Kshetrapati ('the Lord of the soil or site').

Oblations to, or into the domestic fire may be accompanied by *mantras*. Often these formulae, while describing the act which they are to accompany, indicate at the same time the significance of the act and/or the result the performer desires to attain. When the bride is washed with *surā* (an intoxicant), the following *mantra* is uttered:

> O Kāma, I know thy name. Intoxication thou art by name. Do thou bring him (the bridegroom) together (with her). To thee there was *surā*. Here (may there be thy) excellent birth. O Agni, thou art created from penance, hail!

Goblins of disease and disaster (such as Kūrkūra, Sukūrkūra) had a prominent place in domestic and popular rituals. In the

Grihyasūtras a considerable variety of demons, spiritually and materially harmful and partly belonging to an otherwise unknown pantheon, are invoked and even adored in order to remove every manifestation of evil—including disease. Some such passages may have some utility for the history of medicine.

The *sūtras* also mention *mantras* for preventing misfortune, averting evil, blessing or expiation. For instance, when a bridal procession approaches a place where dead bodies are burnt, the *mantra* prescribed is: 'The evil spirits connected with the corpses that lie in those burning grounds must enjoy themselves there; let them not look at the brides.' Similarly, the prayer, 'Agni, the killer of demons, must in harmony with Brahman, drive away from here the disreputable one, the disease (-demon) who rests on your embryo, your womb, etc.', is used in the ceremony for protection of the embryo. Such words also form part of a series of stanzas to be pronounced by a person longing for sons.

The **Upanishads** probably began to be composed before the beginning of our period, i.e., before *c.* 700 BC, but it is likely that some important Upanishads were composed during the long period *c.* 700–*c.* 300 BC and some even later. The *Brihadāraṇyaka* and *Chhāndogya* Upanishads, which occupy so important a place in the development of early Indian thought (see in this series, *The Vedic Age*, 2.5, pp. 59–62) may not have been much earlier than the times of Mahāvīra and the Buddha. It then becomes worth considering whether the attack on the cult of sacrifices through monism (*Extract 4.5*) and the theory of transmigration of souls, first propounded in the two Upanishads mentioned above, had not already developed outside the main lines of Brahmanical thought. That the transmigration of souls was a secret long kept among the Kshatriyas ('Kshatriya Vidya') is, indeed, acknowledged by the Upanishads themselves. If so, it is possible that contrary to the commonly held view of the transmigration theory having been derived by Mahāvīra and the Buddha from the Upanishads, the two teachers, in fact, received it directly from the independent traditions of non-Brahmanical recluses to whose ranks they themselves belonged.

Pāṇini's *Aṣhṭādhyāyī*, the first work on **grammar** in the world, was undoubtedly derived from a pious impulse to establish the correct forms of speech in Sanskrit, as the scriptural language. There is no allusion or word in Pāṇini to suggest a date later than 350 BC, except

for the mention of *yavanānī* (Ionian or Greek, feminine) and *lipi* (script), whose use suggests a slightly later stage in time. Pāṇiṇi's grammar provided the bedrock on which classical Sanskrit was later to be constructed; and, this alone, should secure him a well-deserved place in our cultural history.

Extract 4.1
Spiritual Nihilism
Attributed to Ajita Keshakambalin (so-called from the garb of his order, and a contemporary of the Buddha).

Man is formed of the four elements. When he dies, earth returns to the aggregate of earth, water to water, fire to fire, and air to air, while his senses vanish into space. Four men with the bier take up the corpse; they gossip about the dead man as far as the burning-ground, where his bones turn the colour of a pigeon's wing and his sacrifices end in ashes. They are fools who preach alms giving, and those who maintain the existence (of immaterial categories) speak vain and lying nonsense. When the body dies, both fool and wise alike are cut off and perish. They do not survive after death.

Extract 4.2
Treasure that Cannot be Stolen
The Buddha

A man buries a treasure in a deep pit, thinking: 'it will be useful in time of need, or if the king is displeased with me, or if I am robbed, or fall into debt, or if food is scarce, or bad luck befalls me.'

. . . But by charity, goodness, restraint and self-control man and woman alike can store up a well-hidden treasure—a treasure which cannot be given to others and which robbers cannot steal. A wise man should do good—that is the treasure which will not leave him.

Extract 4.3
The Ājīvika Creed
Maṅkhaliputta (*Makkhali*) *Gosāla*
(inspiration behind the Ājīvika sect)

All that have breath, all that are born, all that have life, are without power, strength or virtue, but are developed by destiny (*niyati*), chance and

nature and experience, joy and sorrow in the six classes (of existence). There are . . . 84,00,000 great aeons (*mahākalpa*), through which fool and wise alike must take their course and make an end of sorrow. There is no (question of) bringing unripe *karma* to fruition, nor of exhausting *karma* already ripened, by virtuous conduct, by vows, by penance, or by chastity. That cannot be done. *Saṃsāra* (universe) is measured as with a bushel, with its joy and sorrow and its appointed end. It can neither be lessened nor increased, nor is there any excess or deficiency of it. Just as a ball of string will, when thrown, unwind to its full length, so fool and wise alike will take their course, and make an end of sorrow.

Extract 4.4

Mahāvīra's Proof of Transmigration of Souls

Dialogue between Mahāvīra and Gosāla before they parted company and established separated Orders (from the *Bhagavatī-viyāhapaṇṇatti*, fifth *aṅga* of the Jaina canon, referred to in our text as the *Bhagavatī*).

One day in the first part of autumn, while going along with Gosāla from Siddhatthagāma to Kumāragāma, Lord Mahāvīra explained the question raised by the former on the sight of a sesame plant, standing at a place by the side of their way, whether it would grow or not and where would its seven seeds be born after its death. Mahāvīra said that the plant would not get destroyed, it would certainly grow and its seven seeds would be born in one capsule of the plant still again.

Gosāla did not believe in this explanation of Lord Mahāvīra and so he, slowly falling back, pulled it out by the roots and threw it in a corner of the field at the same moment. Immediately there appeared a shower of rain by which it was again revived to life and those seven seeds were reborn as seven *tilas* (sesames) in one of its capsules as Mahāvīra had predicted.

But Gosāla would not still believe in the statement of Lord Mahāvīra about its reanimation and those of other plants that they fostered the same body in which they were reborn after their deaths. So he went back to that sesame shrub and plucked out one seed-vessel from it; while counting seven sesame seeds, which were split up by him from the vessel, by placing them on his palm, this kind of thought arose in his mind: 'thus surely, all beings also are born after death and foster'.

Extract 4.5

The Universal Essence

From the *Chhāndogya Upaniṣhad* (*VI.13*), translated by A.L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India*, London, 1956, p. 251, slightly modified.

'Put this salt in water, and come to me in the morning.'

The son did as he was told. The father said: 'Fetch the salt.' The son looked for it, but could not find it, because it had dissolved.

'Taste the water from the top', said the father. 'How does it taste?'

'Of salt', the son replied'.

'Taste from the bottom. How does it taste?'

'Of salt', the son replied again.

Then the father said: 'You do not perceive that One Reality (*sat*) exists in your own body, my son, but it is truly there. Everything which is, has its being in that subtle essence. That is the Reality! That is the Soul! *Tat tvaṃ asi*—you (the individual) are that (universal essence), Shvetaketu.

Note 4.1

The Arrival of Writing

In the previous volume, mention was made of the real meaning of 'recorded history' (*The Vedic Age*, p. 73). The period being covered in the present volume is often thought to belong to the phase of 'recorded history' of the subcontinent. While literary texts continued to be memorized and orally transmitted, the question is whether writing and memorizing now existed side by side.

The early history of writing in India remains problematic. True, the stone inscriptions of the Achaemenid emperors from ancient Iran, written in the old Persian language and in cuneiform script are dated to the sixth, fifth and fourth centuries BC. These are valuable texts for the history of people of northwestern India, especially the Gandhāra region, which is also part of the geography of the so-called 'Sixteen Great States' (*soḷasa mahājanapada*) (see Chapter 3). However, debates have not subsided over the question of evidence of writing in pre-Ashokan times.

One is familiar with the problems of the decipherment of the Harappan or Indus script (see Volume 2 of this series, *Indus Civilization*, pp. 50–1 and 67–71). The long gap between its disappearance around *c.* 1800 BC and the appearance of Ashokan inscriptions after *c.* 270 BC has given rise to several speculations. Did the art of writing die out completely in the second millennium BC? Or did some form of a yet undiscovered script survive and re-emerge in historical times? Was the Vedic culture literate? References to poetic metres, complex arithmetic calculations, etc., have been invoked to contend that such cultural phenomena would be impossible without writing. However, one then needs to explain the complete absence of a single explicit and indisputable reference to writing anywhere in Vedic literature.

Amongst Greek authors, some of whom had come to India with Alexander or shortly after his invasion of northwestern India in the last quarter of the fourth century BC, Nearchus (*c.* 325 BC) mentions that the Indians wrote letters on cotton cloth. But Megasthenes, the famous Greek ambassador in the court of Chandragupta Maurya (*c.* 322–*c.* 298 BC), strongly affirmed that the Indians 'did not know written characters'. Since Nearchus visited only northwestern India, he may have seen evidence of either Kharoṣhṭhi, or, perhaps, Aramaic—both these scripts are seen in Ashokan inscriptions from that area. On the other hand, Megasthenes' observation, made most probably in the context of legal procedures in eastern India, could perhaps not be taken to imply a total absence of writing. The classical accounts, therefore, do not help us in resolving the puzzle.

Though some canonical texts in Pali do make clear allusions to 'private and official correspondence by means of letters', their definite ascription to pre-Mauryan times is somewhat suspect. Quite central to our understanding of the antiquity of writing in the Indian subcontinent is the absolutely unambiguous reference to *lipi / libi* ('script') in Pāṇini's great work on grammar, the *Aṣhṭādhyāyī*. Since the chronology of Pāṇini is also wrapped up in controversy, it would help us to keep in mind an authoritative recent opinion of George Cardona that 'the evidence available hardly allows one to date Pāṇini later than the early to mid-fourth century BC.' While this would certainly push back the antiquity of writing to the pre-Mauryan times, the question of the identity of the script (*lipi*) mentioned by Pāṇini still remains unresolved. It is generally recognized that the great grammarian belonged to northwestern India and, therefore, may have been familiar with the Aramaic script in use in the Achaemenian Empire. This would leave the question of the origins of Indian scripts, especially Brāhmī, and the prevalence of writing in the Ganga plains, still open.

What about archaeological and epigraphic evidence at hand? Scholars have referred to several inscriptions which are clearly written in Brāhmī script and in a non-Sanskrit language (Māgadhī form of Prakrit). The Piprahwa vase inscription recording the deposit of bodily relics, probably of the Buddha; and the Mahāsthān stone plaque and the Sohgaura bronze plaque inscriptions containing instructions for the storage of surplus grain and other products as a precaution against famine, have sometimes been regarded as pre-Mauryan, making them the oldest inscriptions of India. Legitimate doubts have been raised against such early dating. Similarly, claims of some other Brāhmī inscriptions such as those from Deotek and Barli being pre-Mauryan texts have been set aside by more cautious scholars on the grounds of their palaeography being more advanced than that of the inscriptions of Ashoka. The alleged specimens of Kharoṣhṭhi and Brāhmī letters on coins of the Achaemenian emperors of Iran, dating from the fifth and fourth centuries BC, are also doubtful.

The case for the pre-Mauryan origins of Brāhmī script has been re-invograted in recent years from an unexpected quarter. It has been generally assumed that many things including the Brāhmī script came to Sri Lanka with Buddhism from India during Ashoka's time. Recent excavations at Anuradhapura have come up with a

much earlier date (fifth–fourth century BC) for graffiti in Brāhmī on potsherds. (Recently, there have also been claims of Brāhmī characters having been found incised on a potsherd of a pre-Mauryan date recovered from Mangulam in Tamil Nadu.) The unmistakable message of the Anuradhapura evidence is that in Sri Lanka, at least, a primitive form of Brāhmī did indeed predate the Mauryan period. This raises a question about Kharoṣṭhi as well: did Pāṇini's reference to *lipi/libi* imply Kharoṣṭhi? Apparently, an affirmative answer to these questions cannot be absolutely ruled out.

In fact, given the complexities of political organization and the cultural matrix reached in the pre-Mauryan times, it has been contended that the existence of writing would have been necessary. Cautious statements such as that of A.B. Keith that 'the real development of writing belongs in all likelihood to the fifth century BC' are not unreasonable. This point of view put forward in 1922 has recently been reasserted by K.R. Norman and a few other scholars. On the other hand, the complete absence of any trace of Brāhmī writing from any definitely pre-Mauryan strata at any site in northern India still poses a very serious objection to these suggestions.

The earliest inscriptional evidence makes it very clear that the language represented by earliest writing was not Sanskrit. The short inscriptions on potsherds found at Anuradhapura are evidently proper names; and even the language of most of the dubiously pre-Mauryan epigraphs such as Piprahwa and Mahāsthān inscriptions, conforms to varieties of Māgadhī Prakrit. The earliest complete inscription in grammatically correct Sanskrit came almost 450 years later (in *c.* AD 150), when the Shaka king Rudradāman got his poetic panegyric engraved on the same rock surface at Girnar in Junagadh (Gujarat) that carries the Rock Edicts of Ashoka Maurya. Some scholars have argued that a short two-line inscription of Dhana(deva) from Ayodhya is the earliest Sanskrit inscription and have dated it to the first century AD. However, D.C. Sircar, the noted epigraphist, found that its language is not classical Sanskrit but 'San-

FIGURE 4.3 Potsherds bearing Brāhmī characters, excavated from fourth century BC levels at Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka.
(Reprod. R.A.E. Coningham/F.R. Allchin)

skrit influenced by Prakrit'. Significantly, the earliest inscriptions in Tamil, too, antedate those of Sanskrit. These inscriptions are found in Tamil Nadu, and have been dated to the period from the late third century BC to the first century AD. It deserves to be highlighted that these small texts are not royal proclamations but relate to the life of ordinary people. They contain personal and occupational names of donors who endowed, mainly for the benefit of Jaina monks, facilities of stone beds in natural caverns. They also show that the donors were often merchants who traded in gold, cloth, ploughshare, salt, toddy, etc.

Note 4.2

Bibliographical Note

Texts

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Chronology

	BC
Early occurrences of iron in India	*c.* 1000
Wooden palisades, Kankarbagh (Patna)	*c.* 720–*c.* 500
Industrial use of iron begins	*c.* 700
Period of some major Upanishads	*c.* 700–*c.*300
Beginnings of Northern Black Polished Ware	*c.* 600
The rise of the Sixteen *Mahājanapadas*	*c.* 550
Iranian emperor Dārayavaush (Darius I), reigned	522–486
Bimbisāra of Magadha, reigned	*c.* 520–*c.* 492
Iron indispensable for producing most production tools	*c.* 500
Punch-marked coins begin to be minted	*c.* 500
Skylax's discovery of the sea route from Indus to Egypt	*c.* 500
Mahāvīra's death	*c.* 500
Gautama Buddha's death (conventional date)	*c.* 484
Greek historian Herodotus died	*c.* 425
The Buddha's death ('short' chronology)	*c.* 380
Pāṇini flourished	*c.* 350
Nanda dynasty	*c.* 344–*c.* 322
Defeat of Darius III by Alexander	331
Alexander's invasion of northwestern India	327–25
Chandragupta Maurya's accession	*c.* 322
Bhir (Taxila) hoard of punch-marked coins	*c.* 320

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Standing terracotta female figurine, moulded, NBPW phase at Hastināpura
Iron ring fastener, NBPW phase at Atranjikhera
Early punch-marked coin (after P.L. Gupta and T.R. Hardaker)
Ghoshitārāma monastery complex, at Kaushāmbī

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ISBN: 81-89487-13-2

Rs 300